

EDUCATING FOR AN ENGAGED SPIRITUALITY: THE UNION OF
SPIRITUAL NURTURE AND ACTS OF COMPASSION AND JUSTICE
IN THE LIVES OF DOROTHY DAY AND THICH NHAT HANH

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the Faculty of the
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Doctor of Philosophy

by
Janet W. Parachin

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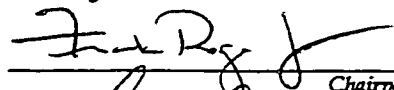
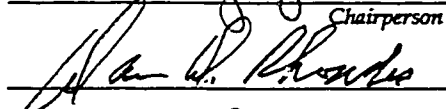
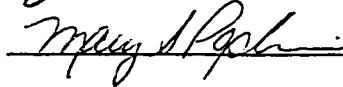
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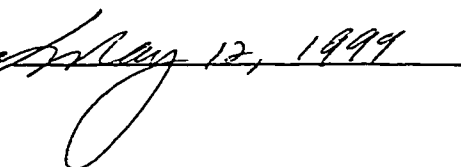
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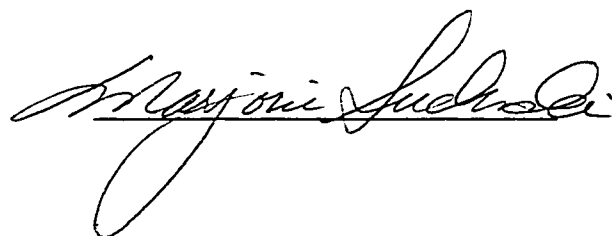
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Chairperson



Date

 May 12, 1999

 Maryoni Sudeki

ABSTRACT

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This project addresses the need for religious education which offers spiritual nurture while at the same time encouraging acts of compassion and justice. It presents a holistic concept of the spiritual life, integrating nurture and action, based on the life stories of persons who exemplify this lifestyle. Finally, it presents a model of and method for teaching Christian religious education derived from the findings of the study.

Christian thinkers representing a variety of disciplines have discussed the relationship between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, demonstrating that these two modes of religious experience are interrelated, not opposed to each other. Theorists in Christian religious education, however, have usually separated these two concerns, rarely discussing how the two can be combined to develop an integrated, holistic approach to the spiritual life. The contemporary situation, however, suggests the urgent need for a concept of spirituality which gives equal attention to both the individual search for religious meaning and the struggles of a hurting world.

Engaged spirituality, defined as a way of living which unites engagement with resources providing spiritual nurture and engagement with others through acts of compassion and justice, is offered as the answer to this particular need. The best way to learn about engaged spirituality and nurture its growth in the community of faith is to identify exemplars whose lives may inspire and guide those embarking on a spiritual journey of their own.

Through the use of an interpretive biographical methodology, this study is comprised of an extended investigation of the life stories, historical contexts, religious affiliations, and personal characteristics of Roman Catholic Dorothy Day and Zen Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh, individuals chosen as exemplars of engaged spirituality. The project ends with a list of lessons learned from these two exceptional lives, and a model for teaching religious education which nurtures an engaged spirituality in Christian congregations. The model includes a theory of religious education which provides spiritual nurture and encourages acts of compassion and justice, suggestions for curriculum development, and a description of the teaching and learning process necessary to cultivate this emphasis in a community of faith.

Now look at yourself and at others with the eyes of
compassion, like a saint who hears the cry of every creature
in the universe and whose voice is the voice of every person
who has seen reality in perfect wholeness.

-Thich Nhat Hanh
The Miracle of Mindfulness

The greatest challenge of the day is:
how to bring about a revolution of the heart,
a revolution which has to start with each one of us?

When we begin to take the lowest place,
to wash the feet of others,
to love our brothers with that burning love,
that passion, which led to the Cross,
then we can truly say, "Now I have begun."

-Dorothy Day
Loaves and Fishes

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CHAPTER 1
THE UNION OF SPIRITUAL NURTURE AND ACTS OF COMPASSION
AND JUSTICE: A HOLISTIC VISION OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

In 1996, a church ministry team from the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas began leading worship services at Samaritan House, a local AIDS shelter in their community. After three services, the residents of the house asked the church members not to return, calling them "Bible beaters." Disappointed and confused, the members stayed away as they were asked.

One of the participants on the church ministry team was Anna Griffith, a woman who wanted to go to Samaritan House because she believed that if Jesus were walking the earth today, an AIDS shelter is the type of place he would choose to go. Refusing to give up on this call to ministry, she took a different approach. She imagined that she herself were facing death, alone and afraid, and asked herself what she would want others to do for her. In a flash the answer came to her: bake chocolate chip cookies!

Laden down with a big batch of homemade cookies, she returned to Samaritan House, and with a smile on her face, she handed one to every person she met. At first the residents were hesitant to accept the gift, believing that Griffith had some ulterior motive in mind. When they tasted the cookies, however, they were delighted to discover they were homemade--and delicious! Every week, "the cookie lady" returned to the house, bringing a different treat. Finally, on the sixth week of her new ministry, one person asked Griffith why she was doing this. The only answer she could offer was, "Because God loves you." Three months

later, someone else asked what her name was. Two years after that, one resident asked Griffith to participate in a Bible study.

Reflecting on her cookie ministry Griffith writes,

If I give you a cookie, it can mean that we have something in common. If it is homemade, . . . it says that I care. If I give it to you . . . with a smile but few words, it conveys that I have no hidden agenda. If I do this the same way, the same day of the week and same time of day, week after week, it will convey that I seek a relationship. Jesus enjoined us to "give a cup of cold water," but they have water already. No one bakes homemade cookies.¹

This story is so exciting because it demonstrates a Christian life which is both ordinary and extraordinary--ordinary because it depicts one person's soulful struggle to live her faith in a way which is both authentic and meaningful, but extraordinary because Griffith found the courage to venture into new territory and to act in ways which are considered out of the ordinary for her particular faith tradition. In reading Griffith's story, I note how she looked first to her Christian heritage for guidance on how to answer the call to ministry at Samaritan House. When her early attempts at worship and Bible study were rebuffed, she did not lose heart because she knew that God's call was sure. So she turned within, undoubtedly making use of the spiritual practices taught to her by her church. Did she pray, study scripture, and confer with church elders? While her brief article does not fully answer this question, my guess is that she did these things and others as well in preparation for the work she was about to undertake. Even more, I believe that these same practices most certainly provide support and guidance as she continues building her relationship with the residents of Samaritan House and contemplates the next stage in the cookie ministry.

¹ Anna Griffith, "'Because No One Says No to a Chocolate-Chip Cookie,'" *Spirituality and Health*, Fall 1998, 17. Reprinted by permission of the publisher of *Spirituality and Health: The Soul/Body Connection* and copyright holder Anna Griffith.

This opening story, reveals a great deal about who I am as religious educator, pastor, and person of deep religious convictions. Working backwards, I am, first of all, one for whom religious and spiritual sensibilities run very deep. From my earliest years, I have been interested in religious issues and things of the spirit. Changing circumstances made it possible for me to be a part of many different Christian communities throughout my life--United Methodist, Free Methodist, Missouri Synod Lutheran, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopalian, and United Church of Christ. Having been active in conservative and liberal, evangelical and progressive Christian congregations, I find my religious yearnings pulling in many different directions, sometimes toward quiet contemplation or loving acts of compassion, other times toward corporate worship or making God's justice manifest in the world. I have also read widely in spirituality from the perspective of many different religious traditions. In addition, I began a regular practice of prayer and meditation many years ago. All of these aspects have enhanced my study of religion and participation in religious activities throughout the years.

Secondly, I am a pastor who answered God's call to ministry when I was a teenager. As an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I have made my choice to serve God through the institutional church, rather than as one outside the system. This is indeed significant, for I believe that my commitment to the church shines through all of my work. By "the church" I do not mean one particular Christian denomination. Rather, I mean the church of Jesus Christ in its many manifestations in all times, places, and circumstances throughout the world. I love being a member and representative of the Disciples of Christ because of our tradition's strong emphases on church unity, intellectual and theological freedom,

biblical faith, personal devotion, and communal commitment enacted weekly in worship and in the partaking of the Lord's Supper.

These days I have taken to calling myself a "progressive" Christian, rather than the more common designation of "mainline." By this I intend that I consciously participate in moving Christianity beyond those ways of thinking and being which are stifling and stagnating. Christianity (indeed, all religious traditions) should be imbued with a spiritual energy which acts as a life-giving force in the lives of individuals, communities, societies, nations, and the natural world. Sadly, some Christian communities, in an attempt to preserve the treasured doctrines and practices of the tradition, prevent those traditions from growing in meaning and application because they fail to bring them into conversation with the concerns of the present generation. Other communities seem to compromise the integrity of the tradition altogether by allowing Christian teaching and practice to be changed by everything with which it comes into contact, so that only a hodge-podge of the original aspects remains. In contrast, progressive Christians are aware of the global context of their faith commitment and, as a result, are open to the witness of other paths of faith. At the same time, however, progressive Christians are definitely Christian in their identity and focus, seeking to develop their contemporary profession of faith and action out of the historic witness of Christianity from its inception to the present day.

Another problem evident in expressions of Christianity is the tendency for individuals, congregations, and whole denominations to choose either quiet, personal acts of devotion or outward acts of justice and mercy. Some churches teach that getting right with God is the most important aspect of the Christian life, while others tell their members to go out and make things right in the world. Unfortunately, participation in practices which nurture personal spiritual growth and

involvement in social ministry are usually described as mutually exclusive, as if persons can pursue one or the other, not both simultaneously. I believe that progressive Christianity, with its global context and commitment to the historic faith tradition, provides an ideal setting for the exploration of a spirituality which both provides for spiritual nurture and encourages acts of compassion and justice. Clearly, both dimensions of the spiritual journey are represented in Christian tradition; both dimensions of spirituality are needed in the global, pluralistic context of which contemporary Christians are a part.

Thirdly, my chosen profession is that of religious educator, a position which allows me to converse with educators from many different traditions as we learn from each other and seek a common language, but which also keeps me closely linked to the church as I share my Christian perspective with others and discover how their insights can enhance education in the Church. I approach this work in religious education carrying with me both my deep religious convictions and commitment to spiritual practice, and my pastor's heart, which compel me to be in ministry to the world as I have been called by God. As a progressive Christian, I seek to be true to both the global context for ministry and education and the integration of nurture and action demanded by the times in which we live. Even more, I wish to develop a way of articulating and presenting Christian religious education which supports and nurtures this holistic spirituality.

The Problem and Purpose of the Dissertation

Confronted with stories like the one with which I began this chapter, I am compelled to ask, How are Christian congregations assisting people to live their faith in the world? How are Christian

communities making the vast resources of the tradition available to persons so that they can develop their individual spiritualities to the fullest? As Anna Griffith's story demonstrates, congregations are struggling with these issues. Locked into the mindset that spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice are somehow unrelated to each other, they may encourage church members to develop personal devotional practices or to engage in acts of charity and justice-making, but rarely provide opportunities for persons to do both--pray *and* act, meditate *and* change the world.

In recent years theorists writing in various disciplines have sought to address this false dichotomy between the quiet and active sides of religious expression. Christian theologian Robert McAfee Brown, for instance, has noted the tendency for Christians to polarize religious faith into two sectors--"spirituality" and "liberation." He says that those Christians who wish to be true to the intention of biblical faith must seek to integrate these two poles.² To understand more fully the scope and implications of Brown's thought and the work of other writers in religion who are concerned about the integration of spiritual nurture and social action, a full survey of their writings is included later in this chapter.

There are also Christian religious educators who have noted the need for a greater emphasis on the integration of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. For example, John Westerhoff notes that an either/or mentality plagues the church. Unless the split between piety and politics, and personal contemplation and social witness can be healed, he says, Christians will be unable to know the spiritual life in all of its fullness.³ Westerhoff's comments are not typical of the

² Robert McAfee Brown, *Spirituality and Liberation: Overcoming the Great Fallacy* (Louisville: Westminster, 1988), 111-24.

³ John H. Westerhoff, *Inner Growth, Outer Change: An Educational Guide to Church Renewal* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 11-13.

concerns of most Christian religious educators. A survey of these theorists will demonstrate that, overall, educators have not embraced this integrated approach, but instead have allowed education for spiritual formation and education for social justice to develop as separate emphases in the field. Often an author suggests ways in which his or her chosen form of education incorporates aspects of the other emphasis, but, as a rule, whenever writers attempt to address both spiritual formation and social justice, they take as their main emphasis one form of education and view the other form through the perspective created by the other.

Clearly, now is the time to develop a practical theory of religious education which intentionally incorporates both spiritual nurture and social justice. One clue for developing such a theory can be found in the observation of certain exemplary individuals who are regularly recognized as spiritual social activists, such as the two persons I have chosen for this study--Roman Catholic Dorothy Day and Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. A promising approach to learning more about a holistic spirituality is to study the lives of Day and Nhat Hanh, two people who express what I call an "engaged spirituality."⁴ To accomplish this inquiry, I look specifically at the historical, cultural, and religious contexts, and the personal qualities which combine to create an engaged spirituality in the lives of Day and Nhat Hanh.

Finally, the task of religious education is to recognize the sources which contribute to the formation of an engaged spirituality and

⁴ I have come across only one other scholar who uses the phrase "engaged spirituality." As part of an article about Thich Nhat Hanh, Sallie King compares Buddhist and Christian expressions of "engaged spirituality," but she does not fully define the term or spell out the differences in these two manifestations. See Sallie B. King, "Thich Nhat Hanh and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam: Nondualism in Action," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, ed. Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 352.

then to nurture these sources in the members of a community of faith. Thus, having described and analyzed the formative influences which helped to create the engaged spiritualities exhibited by Day and Nhat Hanh, I conclude this project by recounting the lessons learned from these two lives and offering recommendations for Christian religious educators seeking to nurture an engaged spirituality within their own contexts. In the last chapter, I present an educational model for religious education which intentionally nurtures both spiritual nurture and social action, list guidelines for curriculum selection/formulation, and describe a process for teaching and learning which supports and nurtures an engaged spirituality.

The first task in this process is to survey the writings of theorists in various fields of religion who view spiritual nurture and participation in acts of compassion and justice not as unrelated, but as integral, aspects of the spiritual life. This effort enables me to present a clear definition of what I intend by an "engaged spirituality." Before I can move into this discussion, however, I need to address two more preliminary topics, namely, the definitions of terms which are integral to this study and the various philosophical assumptions which undergird my work.

Definitions of Pertinent Terms

A good place to start is with the notion of spirituality. Since I offer an extended definition of engaged spirituality at the conclusion of this chapter, let me begin by challenging some misconceptions about spirituality. *Spirituality* is not just another designation for prayer and other quiet, personal pursuits. Furthermore, spirituality is not to be equated with other-worldliness, as if it precludes one from being concerned with the cares of the world. This said, I offer a brief

definition of spirituality as "living in awareness of and relationship to that which transcends personal experience." Foundational to this definition is the assertion that every person has a spirituality because every person has a spiritual dimension.⁵ Every person has some awareness of and relationship to that which transcends their own personal experience, whether encountered through mystical heights of religious ecstasy, a sense of camaraderie engendered by a gathering of like-minded individuals, the simple joy of beholding a stately tree, or the opportunity to give of oneself to another. For some people this awareness and relationship are more developed, while others only catch glimpses of that which transcends their own personal experience.

The emphasis on "living in awareness of and relationship to" is significant because it keeps persons grounded in the present moment. Though one may seem to temporarily withdraw from their own personal concerns when relating to "that which transcends," they are never completely separated from their own interests or the cares of the world. As a human being, one's responsibility is to oneself as well as to that which transcends one's own personal experience. Thus, when speaking of "that which transcends personal experience," different persons and communities will use different names: some affirm belief in a Supreme Being, such as God or Allah, while others point to a life force or energy they would call Divine Mystery, wisdom, love, service, or the Great Chain of Being. Spirituality, as living in awareness of and relationship to that which transcends personal experience, requires that persons look beyond their own personal concerns (although a healthy spirituality never devalues these private issues) in order to face the larger implications of living in this place at this time in history. Hence, response to "that which transcends" can take a variety of forms,

⁵ For my description of the holistic nature of the human person see p. 15 below.

e.g., answering a call from God, accepting one's responsibilities toward neighbors and the earth, recognizing the interdependence of all being, or thoughtfully considering how one's choices affect the world as a whole.

The notion of spirituality I am developing is called an "engaged spirituality," a way of living in awareness of and relationship to that which transcends personal experience comprised of two distinct, but interrelated, dimensions: connecting and re-connecting with the springs of living water which sustain the human soul and participating in actions which meet the needs of a suffering world. I will have much more to say about engaged spirituality at the end of this chapter. For now, let me describe two of its component parts--spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice.

Spiritual nurture is the process of connecting and re-connecting with the source of spirituality as well as the practice of actively cultivating that relationship. Spiritual nurture may occur in many different settings, religious or secular. In its religious manifestation, spiritual nurture involves tapping into the rich spiritual resources which are a part of one's own historic faith tradition. For Christians, spiritual nurture could include, but not be limited to, prayer, worship, and contemplation. For Jews, it could include prayer, keeping Sabbath, and mystical engagement with the Hebrew alphabet. For Buddhists, it could be fostered through mindfulness meditation and participation in a Sangha (a community which practices mindfulness). It could, in reality, take a variety of forms, depending upon the religious and cultural factors which converge at a particular time and place. One striking example is the difference in worship styles just among Christians: the formal liturgy of Roman Catholics, the

spontaneity of Baptists, the quiet piety of Presbyterians, and the unbridled joy of Church of God in Christ worshippers.

Spiritual nurture is akin, but not identical, to spiritual formation. *Spiritual formation* is the intentional process of guiding people to embrace the values and lifestyle of a particular religious tradition. Faith communities primarily engage in the spiritual formation of individuals, although they participate in the spiritual nurture of persons as well. I prefer to talk of "spiritual nurture" when describing engaged spirituality because the word "nurture" has a more organic quality than the word "formation." Formation suggests that some power from outside of the human being is giving shape to the person they are becoming. To be certain, this is one aspect, but not the totality, of growth in spirituality. Nurture provides a more complete picture because it describes something which both arises from within and is cultivated from without; the impulses toward living in awareness of and relationship to that which transcends personal experience bubble up from somewhere within a person's spirit *and* are learned through the teaching and example of others who have made the spiritual journey a priority in their own lives. This acceptance of the inner and outer aspects of spiritual formation compel us to recognize that while there are many things individuals and communities can do to awaken and give shape to spirituality, its movement is ultimately a mystery.

Acts of compassion and justice are just that: any acts of compassion, care, or justice-making which seek to meet the needs of a hurting world--reaching out to individuals, communities, nations, and the natural world. Such acts can be as varied as serving food in a soup kitchen, lobbying Congress on behalf of children's rights, and reaching out to offer comfort to a family mourning the death of a loved one. In this regard, *social service* is sometimes differentiated from *social*

action: while service is said to deal with the effects of social problems, action is lauded for addressing the causes of those problems.⁶ Rather than dismissing social service as mere charity, I wish to include service as a necessary, though often partial, aspect of social action; service to the poor and those in pain may very well be the catalyst for deep compassion and for the decision to mitigate the underlying causes of their suffering. For example, one's inclination to give compassionate care to a cancer patient in one's congregation could lead to the start of an organized effort to meet the needs of cancer patients throughout one's local community. *Social change* has to do with the transformation of the social structures which are perceived as the cause of individual and corporate suffering. Activists seeking social change often become involved in writing legislation or may choose to disobey laws to protest injustice. Not all persons who participate in social action seek social change, although a person's inclination toward social activism does seem to suggest a certain discontent with the status quo which might eventually lead them to seek social change.

One word of caution is in order here. Although I use the word "spiritual" when describing the spiritual nurture aspect of engaged spirituality, I do not mean that the other aspect--engaging in acts of compassion and justice--is not a spiritual endeavor. By virtue of the fact that persons engaging in such acts are living in awareness of and relationship to that which transcends their personal experience, such compassionate, justice-seeking acts are indeed spiritual. By the same token, when I speak of "acts" of compassion and justice, I do not mean to suggest that spiritual nurture is only quiet and peaceful, having no actions of its own. To the contrary, spiritual nurture is often quite active, particularly when one thinks of the activities which surround

⁶ Harry Fagan, *Empowerment: Skills for Parish Social Action* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 11-12.

worship, ritual, religious education and other forms of spiritual seeking. I am limited, in this regard, by language and the meanings most often assigned to these particular phrases. I hope that my definitions of these words have clarified what I intend when I say "spiritual nurture" and "acts of compassion and justice." I do believe that their meanings and the profound interrelationship between the two will become clearer as this study progresses.

I write about the integration of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice in the context of *religious education*, defined both as a field of academic study and as a critical task of individual faith communities. Whether studied in the academy or carried out as a program in a Christian congregation, Jewish synagogue, or Buddhist Sangha, religious education is a complex blend of theory and practice, not unlike the complex blend of nurture and action which comprises spirituality. Borrowing from religious educator Robert Pazmiño, I affirm that religious education has a three-fold purpose--to share the information that comprises a particular religious tradition, to provide formation in the values and lifestyle espoused by that tradition, and to enable the transformation of individuals, communities, societies, and structures.⁷ Different faith traditions manifest their religious education in different ways, thereby necessitating various designations for education in the differing traditions, i.e., Christian religious education, Buddhist religious education, Jewish religious education, Muslim religious education, etc. Despite differences in name and

⁷ Pazmiño is describing Christian education, not the more general field of religious education. Therefore he emphasizes the sharing of Christian information, or telling the Christian story; providing Christian formation, or leading people to live a Christian lifestyle and espouse Christian values; and enabling Christian transformation, or the conversion of persons, societies and structures toward the reign of God in Christ Jesus. I am not certain whether or not he would agree that the same three-fold purpose can be applied to religious education carried out in settings other than Christian. See Robert W. Pazmiño, *Latin American Journey: Insights for Christian Education in North America* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1994), 61.

content, the three-fold formula of transmission of information, formation in faith and values, and transformation of individuals and society holds true across religious lines.

I write in the context of *Christian religious education*. The church of Jesus Christ is entrusted with a sacred responsibility to teach the history, beliefs, and practices of Christianity; to guide and assist Christians in living their lives after the example of Jesus Christ; to help meet the human longing for self-transcendence and connection with God's Spirit; and to participate in God's vision for the world by seeking to discern God's will and to act on God's behalf as they are called. In a word, the church facilitates spiritual formation, or growth in spirituality. In the local congregation, religious education is not just limited to classes offered on Sundays or during the week; the congregation teaches through everything that is said and done, as well as by everything it refuses to say or do. Like Maria Harris I affirm that the church does not have a curriculum of religious education, it *is* the curriculum of religious education. The congregation educates through every form of ministry--through its community life, its prayer and worship, its preaching and proclamation, its service and outreach, and its teaching and learning.⁸ Religious educators have an essential role in giving shape to these curricular forms and in helping people to discern what God is calling them to do and to be in their own particular time and place in history.

In conclusion, let me point out what will certainly become evident, namely, that there will not be total agreement among writers on the meanings of the terms I described above. On those occasions when writers are using these words differently from how I intend them, or are

⁸ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 63-64.

using other words to suggest what I have described here, I will endeavor to point out the discrepancies.

Assumptions

I began this chapter describing myself as a religious educator, pastor, and person of deep religious convictions. I also explained what I mean when I call myself a "progressive" Christian. Here are some additional philosophical assumptions which are essential for understanding how I approach and carry out this project:

First, persons are integrated wholes, comprised of intellectual, affective, physical, and spiritual dimensions. To say that a person is mind only or spirit only is false. To say that one dimension of the human person is more important than the others is also false. Certainly, one or more dimensions may be more fully developed in each individual person, but this does not diminish the role the others play in a person's life. In fact, the weakness of one demonstrates the necessity of giving special attention to that one, since its immaturity is likely to show itself in unexpected ways. For instance, the physically strong person may see no need for things of the spirit until their courage is tested by an accident which leaves them bedridden. The four dimensions interrelate and affect each other, as when emotional distress results in physical symptoms, or when clarity of mind leads to spiritual understanding. Helping persons to become aware of the relationship among the four dimensions and to seek integration is an important task of the educational process.

Second, life is the classroom for education. Because persons are integrated and whole, every activity, experience, and encounter is an opportunity to learn. This is as true for communities as it is for individuals. Furthermore, because the spiritual dimension is one part of the whole person, every activity, experience, and encounter is

likewise an opportunity to learn more about the spiritual journey one undertakes both alone and in community. In this context, religious education cannot just draw from explicitly religious activities, such as Sunday School meetings and shared rituals, but must consciously seek to integrate all aspects of human living, including work experiences, the social situation, and personal crises.

Third, in the educational process, theory and practice are necessarily interrelated as well. How one thinks about and describes the teaching and learning process cannot easily be separated from how one actually engages in the teaching and learning process. What is understood in theory must be applied in practice, and what is discovered in practice must be used to reinterpret theory. In the church this means that the practice of religious education is not merely the application of principles and theories developed by some well-informed source working apart from the congregational situation; rather, religious education is a dynamic activity which draws from many sources, including the teachings and practices of the Christian tradition, the historical/cultural context in which teaching and learning take place, and the experiences of persons and the community of faith.

Fourth, religious education takes place in the midst of a religiously pluralistic environment. The Christian tradition is never taught and reinterpreted in isolation, but always in relationship to other religious traditions. Even more, Christian identity is shaped not only by the teachings and practices of one's own tradition, but also by encounter with and observation of the teachings and practices of other people of faith who may follow a spiritual path very different from one's own. This has most certainly been the case in some settings, such as Asian cultures, where Christianity cannot be understood apart from the other religious traditions which participate in the shaping of the religious milieu. I believe that a similar situation exists in the

United States where contemporary Christians are constantly reminded of the radically pluralistic world of which they are a part and are intimately acquainted with people of other faith traditions at school, at work, and in their communities. Christian congregations can best be attentive to this global, pluralistic context by inviting parishioners to be in conversation with persons representing other traditions and to face the challenges that such differences present.

Finally, for Christians, the biblical call to integrate spiritual nurture and social action provides the basis for living the spiritual life and for engaging in spiritual formation in the church. Although the entire witness of scripture suggests a lifestyle which incorporates devotion to God and service to the world, two biblical passages bring the teaching into clearer focus. First, in a much-loved verse from Micah, the prophet asks, "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8 NRSV). Several writers have explored the interrelationship among those three injunctions, and all have concluded that to fully live the spiritual life one must seek to integrate spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice.⁹ Another significant passage recounts the words of Jesus in response to the question, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Quoting from the Jewish legal code, he answered, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31 NRSV). Note the integration of affect, spirit, mind, and body Jesus expects from those who would be God's friends. Not only did he call upon others to love

⁹ See Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks, and Thomas H. Groome, *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly: An Agenda for Ministers* (New York: Paulist, 1986); and Donal Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984).

God and neighbor, but he also exemplified this dual commitment in his own life as he incorporated both the cultivation of a personal relationship with God and intentional acts of care and mercy.

Christian theologians, philosophers, and ethicists have sought to explain the meaning and ramifications of the integration of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. The following exploration of their attempts to understand this relationship prepares the way for a definition of "engaged spirituality" at the conclusion of this chapter.

Uniting Spiritual Nurture and Acts of Compassion and Justice: A Survey

In discussing the spiritual life, the following writers use a variety of designations to indicate the two aspects of spirituality, such as "contemplation" and "action," the "inward and outward journeys," or "openness" and "response-ability."¹⁰ Some, like Henri Nouwen, use a three-pronged approach, referring to the spiritual life as growth in relationship with oneself, relationship with others, and relationship with God.¹¹ Still others offer phrases which unite spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice into one field of vision, as in William Stringfellow's "biblical spirituality" and William Johnston's "mysticism in action."¹² However they choose to express it, these writers share a common understanding of the spiritual life which draws together the quiet and the active, the inward and the outward, the divine and the mundane. Some, like Leon-Joseph Suenens and Helder

¹⁰ Corita Clarke, *A Spirituality for Active Ministry* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1991), 2; Elizabeth O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), ix; and Samuel Rayan, "The Search for an Asian Spirituality of Liberation," in *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions*, ed. Virginia Fabella, et al. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992), 22.

¹¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1975).

¹² William Stringfellow, *The Politics of Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 29; and William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 27.

Camara, believe these two aspects of spirituality are absolutely interrelated and inseparable.¹³ In contrast, Gerry Heard describes the contemplative and the active as two modes of religious experience which share some common characteristics and only overlap occasionally.¹⁴ To better understand the relationship between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice and how they interact in the spiritual life, I now highlight several themes which arise from my reading of these Christian theologians, philosophers, and ethicists.

First, the justification for the integration of spiritual nurture and social action is drawn from the historic faith tradition. Donal Dorr, as has already been noted, derives his notion of an "integral spirituality" from the words of the prophet Micah, "to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly."¹⁵ Likewise, Corita Clarke demonstrates that preoccupation with contemplation or action constitute two strong movements in the history of Christian spirituality. While the two ways of life have often been seen as different from, even in opposition to, each other, certain individuals and movements throughout history have brought the two together. Embracing this integrated approach, she says, is the challenge for Christian ministry today.¹⁶

Some authors heartily affirm that the roots of this integrated spirituality run very deep in Christianity. Gustavo Gutierrez assures skeptics that the spirituality of liberation coming to the fore in Latin America arises out of a rich spiritual tradition, namely, the teachings of Christ. He reminds readers of the words of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, that people should "drink from their own well," meaning that all great spiritualities come into existence and are continually nurtured by

¹³ Leon-Joseph Suenens and Helder Camara, *Charismatic Renewal and Social Action: A Dialogue* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1979), 29.

¹⁴ Gerry C. Heard, *Mystical and Ethical Experience* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985), 69-71.

¹⁵ Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice*, 8.

¹⁶ Clarke, 15-19, 50.

ancient spiritual sources.¹⁷ Kenneth Leech concurs that liberation spirituality is not a form of Christianity; it is the very heart of the Christian life.¹⁸

Leech makes explicit a perspective which is only implicit in many of these writings, i.e., the importance of looking to persons who exemplify this liberation spirituality for inspiration and guidance. His "communion of saints" is as diverse as the hopeful mystic Julian of Norwich and the urban radical Saul Alinsky.¹⁹ Dorr also suggests that learning from exemplars is a natural and necessary outgrowth of aligning oneself with a religious tradition that teaches and nurtures an integral spirituality.²⁰

The primary reason these authors describe the integration of spiritual nurture and social action in the first place is because they seek to challenge a compartmentalized view of spirituality which limits spiritual pursuits to only the quiet, devotional aspects of religion. In reality, spirituality touches every aspect of human existence, encompassing the ordinary experiences of everyday life and the transcendent experiences of religious encounter. Gutierrez, for instance, critiques a notion of spirituality which emphasizes the personal and ignores the social dimension, which concentrates only on the internal life and refuses to hear the cries of those who suffer in the world.²¹ Leech believes an equal emphasis on the corporate dimension of the spiritual life is a necessary antidote to a notion of spirituality shaped by rampant individualism; spirituality should be

¹⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984), 1-4, 37.

¹⁸ Kenneth Leech, *The Eye of the Storm: Spiritual Resources for the Pursuit of Justice* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1992), 46.

¹⁹ Ibid., 162-93.

²⁰ Donal Dorr, *Integral Spirituality: Resources for Community, Justice, Peace and Earth* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990), 269-70.

²¹ Gutierrez, 13-15.

defined as "the whole life of the human person and human community in their relationship with the divine."²²

Robert McAfee Brown notes that Jesus, in his earthly ministry, provided for the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of persons. Jesus made no distinction between the spiritual and the material; he fed people and healed them just as readily as he preached the good news.²³ The biblical spirituality Stringfellow believes Christians are meant to embrace requires them to live holistically, seeking not perfection but wholeness, not godliness but true humanity, not removing themselves from the world but becoming more deeply embedded in it.²⁴

While most of these writers address only a person's dual responsibility to God and to humanity, a few also describe a spiritual awareness which encompasses all of reality. Samuel Rayan, writing from an Asian perspective, declares that spirituality has two movements: the spiritual life begins in openness to the depth and mystery of every aspect of reality, and continues in the willingness to respond to those realities in appropriate ways. Thus, spirituality requires conversion, i.e., the ability to experience all of reality in new, deep, life-changing ways.²⁵ Using a slightly different configuration, Dorr describes the spiritual life as having three overlapping aspects--structural justice, interpersonal respect, and personal integrity--which meet in the center at a place called "shalom." Shalom is realized when one is at peace with oneself, others, God, the cosmos, and the natural world.²⁶ Likewise, ethicist Mark O'Keefe writes that Christian spirituality should primarily be concerned with the formation of authentic relationships with God, other people, and all that God

²² Leech, 16-17.

²³ Brown, 81-82.

²⁴ Stringfellow, 29-32.

²⁵ Rayan, 22-26.

²⁶ Dorr, *Integral Spirituality*, 5-6.

created. Christians should recognize this task as more than just a utopian dream, but as a possibility for life here and now.²⁷

The relational aspect of spirituality highlighted by O'Keefe is also an important factor in the development of a way of life which incorporates both active and contemplative dimensions. He demonstrates that Christian spirituality is built on the biblical concepts of love and justice: love seeks mutuality, while justice aims at right relationships. Taken together, they form the basis for a spiritual life which combines contemplative practice and social justice.²⁸

This same theme is given urgency by two who know the difficulties of maintaining spiritual fortitude in the midst of religiously pluralistic cultures where Christians are in the minority. Rayan notes that Christians in Asia cannot define spirituality in strictly Christian terms. Doing so would not only alienate the majority of persons who are not Christian, but would also create a narrow-minded approach to the spiritual life which fails to take into the account the fullness of reality which comprises all things of the Spirit.²⁹ In a similar vein, Raimon Panikkar, concerned with creating the best possible conditions for interreligious dialogue, encourages contemplatives and activists to join in conversation with one another. The two viewpoints challenge and correct each other, thereby revealing the "invisible harmony" that undergirds all things.³⁰

Another urgent theme which finds expression in some of these writings is the relationship between the spiritual life and participation in politics. Brown, for instance, suggests that the juxtaposition of spirituality and liberation requires a new way of

²⁷ Mark O'Keefe, *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy: On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality* (New York: Paulist, 1995), 75-76.

²⁸ Ibid., 83-88.

²⁹ Rayan, 18-21.

³⁰ Raimon Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*, ed. Harry James Cargas (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 35-36.

acting and speaking, i.e., "speaking with one's actions." Because it calls upon persons to take a stand for what they believe in, living a life of spirituality and liberation puts their safety and security at grave risk.³¹ Dorr agrees, saying that to "act justly" means one must enter into the political sphere. In a very public way, one must ask how wealth is distributed and investigate who holds the power in society. With this knowledge in hand, one must act to correct injustices in the political dimension.³²

Several writers also spoke of the need to understand and challenge unjust structures in society. Francis Meehan describes a social spirituality in which devotion to God flows over into acts of goodwill for one's neighbor. Since the neighbor's situation is deeply embedded in societal structures, spirituality must take account of those structures when seeking to do good.³³ Gutierrez approaches the problem of social structures somewhat differently. Sin, he says, occurs on both the individual and systemic levels, therefore conversion is needed which addresses both the needs of the individual and the problems of the current political, economic, and social system.³⁴ Likewise, Jon Sobrino talks of "political holiness" which has two interrelated dimensions: holiness refers to that lifestyle which marks one as a follower of Jesus, while politics refers to actions challenging those structural injustices which prevent God's reign from becoming real here on earth. The spiritual person seeks to grow in "political love," refusing to let oppression and poverty continue.³⁵

Responding to poverty is another theme which finds expression in the integration of spiritual nurture and social action, primarily among

³¹ Brown, 136.

³² Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice*, 14-16.

³³ Francis Xavier Meehan, *A Contemporary Social Spirituality* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982), 1-10.

³⁴ Gutierrez, 97-99.

³⁵ Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), 80-81.

the liberation theologians. Nestor Jaen states that liberation spirituality always begins with an awareness of the plight of the poor, moving one to then mitigate the circumstances which keep them oppressed. The best way to show one's solidarity with the poor is to nurture those social, political, and economic conditions which will allow spirituality to grow.³⁶ In a similar vein, Sobrino believes that Christian spirituality finds its deepest expression in advocacy for the poor majorities. When Christians acknowledge the existence of the poor in the world, they are forced to confront what is ultimate in life and are challenged to choose whether they will side with Jesus and the poor or with those who oppress the poor.³⁷ Segundo Galilea affirms that serving the poor is a way to serve God, while rejection of the poor is outright rejection of God. Love of the poor is itself spirituality, making one more contemplative and more willing to serve others.³⁸ Finally, Gutierrez lists "spiritual childhood" as one of the characteristics of a spirituality of liberation. Christians are called to share the life of the poor; by refusing to acquire worldly wealth they show their solidarity with those in poverty.³⁹

Among the various writers who seek the union of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice are some who are interested in the personal aspects of this integration, such as understanding how the experience of God is enhanced by one's pursuit of a holistic spirituality, how nurture and action assist persons in reaching spiritual maturity, and how ego development is affected by this process. With regard to the experience of God, two different viewpoints are evident--those who see nurture and action as two paths in the spiritual

³⁶ Nestor Jaen, *Toward a Liberation Spirituality*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1981), 10-11.

³⁷ Sobrino, 30-35.

³⁸ Segundo Galilea, *The Way of Living Faith: A Spirituality of Liberation*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 125, 139.

³⁹ Gutierrez, 122-27.

life, and those who believe the path is unified. Heard, for instance, maintains that the mystical and the ethical are two separate ways of experiencing God; God can be intuited in a direct manner or in the course of one's relationships with others. The mystical experience quite often leads to ethical experiences, but the opposite rarely occurs. Although Heard would not want to make the distinction too dramatic, believing that there is some overlap in the mystical and the ethical, he does insist that they are two ways.⁴⁰

Thomas Merton presents a unified approach to the spiritual life which strongly challenges Heard's argument for the separation of the mystical and the ethical. An essential aspect of the mystical journey, according to Merton, is to come to know God as pure Love. Once this Love is experienced, persons immediately begin to know the depth of God's love for all. Such persons no longer feel alone, for they recognize that they share the same spiritual journey with all others.⁴¹ This prompts Merton to write,

One of the paradoxes of the mystical life is this: that a man cannot enter into the deepest center of himself and pass through that center to God unless he is able to pass entirely out of himself and empty himself and give himself to other people in the purity of selfless love.⁴²

Henri Nouwen expresses a similar thought when he describes the spiritual life as having three movements--reaching out to one's innermost self, reaching out to others, and reaching out to God. These may seem like three different ways of developing one's spirituality, and indeed each movement has its own characteristics and aims. Ultimately, however, the three aspects of the spiritual life are closely intertwined, addressing comparable issues and using similar practices to

⁴⁰ Heard, 1,71.

⁴¹ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1961), 65.

⁴² Ibid., 64.

develop its themes, very much like the way certain notes in a symphony weave their way throughout the entire piece of music.⁴³

One who describes the integration of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice from the perspective of spiritual maturity is Patrick Madigan. He describes a three-part model of Christian development which moves from repentance-conversion, to contemplation-adoration, to response-service. All three are necessary for the realization of spiritual maturity. While there is a logical progression from beginning to end, this developmental process is better perceived as cyclical, as a person moves into deeper levels of conversion, contemplation, and service throughout her life.⁴⁴

Several writers also consider how the individual ego is affected by the pursuit of a life combining spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. Merton, for instance, contrasts the "true" and "false" selves: the "false" self is a mask or illusion, the face one shows to others; the "true" self is who a person really is, the person God created them to be. The practice of contemplation heightens the contrast between the true and false selves and results in the "awakening of the unknown 'I' that is beyond observation and reflection and is incapable of commenting upon itself."⁴⁵ Heard adds to this when he says that the experience of God, whether in a mystical or ethical way, requires self-denial, i.e., putting aside one's own self-interests so that God's love may take their place. This effort paves the way for a personal experience of God either through direct awareness of God's presence or through encounters with God's universe.⁴⁶

⁴³ Nouwen, 18-20.

⁴⁴ Patrick Madigan, *Penance, Contemplation and Service: Pivotal Experiences in Christian Spirituality* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1994), ix, 2-6.

⁴⁵ Merton, 7.

⁴⁶ Heard, 28.

Johnston, seeing a more unified relationship between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, suggests that mysticism in action involves a loss of self in which a person decides to seek God instead of pursuing their own interests. For such persons, Christ becomes the center of their lives, leading them to serve those in need.⁴⁷ Taking a slightly different approach, Max Oliva is concerned with the blockages in the ego which make it difficult for persons to receive God's love and freely share that love with others. He suggests the use of the freedom-prayer in which a person asks, "What do I need that I'm not receiving?" Once the answer becomes evident, the person then asks God to free them from needing that thing, such as the need to be liked, the need for security, or the need to be in control. Asking for freedom from the need creates a healthy detachment which allows one to freely accept God's love and pass on that love to others through acts of compassion and social justice.⁴⁸

One last theme raised by some of these writers is how a holistic spirituality can be cultivated in the midst of congregational life. Clarke develops a spirituality which integrates prayer and action for persons involved in the ministry of the congregation. She says that Christian community stands at the center of both dimensions of spirituality; members offer actions of love and goodwill in response to the presence of God they have experienced through prayer. Members of the community challenge each other to remain faithful to what God has revealed to them as a result of their prayer and action.⁴⁹ Elizabeth O'Connor, drawing from the experiences of her congregation, the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., describes the two journeys of the spiritual life, one inward, the other outward. The inward journey

⁴⁷ Johnston, 28-29.

⁴⁸ Max Oliva, *Free to Pray, Free to Love: Growing in Prayer and Compassion* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1994), 111, 35.

⁴⁹ Clarke, 54-59.

consists of three engagements--with oneself, with God, and with others. Diligent attention to this journey paves the way for the journey outward, exemplified by ministry to persons living in the inner city. Her congregation sponsors various mission groups which provide the setting for individuals' pursuit of the inward and outward journeys: contemplation leads one to join an existing or create a new mission group, allowing one to engage in active ministry; in turn, that group develops contemplative practices consistent with its focus and the needs of the group members.⁵⁰

From the esoteric to the practical, these diverse writers have explored the relationship between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice in a way which makes sense within their own settings, using language which fits their own purposes. Though various themes have emerged from this survey, one idea weaves its way through all the discussions, namely, that nurture and action are not the opposites they appear to be on the surface; instead, they are integrally related to each other in such a way that if one were to be neglected, the other would also be diminished. Another term for this integration of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice is "engaged spirituality." The insights offered by these theorists can help give shape to a more complete understanding of what this spirituality entails.

Engaged Spirituality: A Proposal

Very simply, engaged spirituality is a life path in which one intentionally embarks upon a dual engagement: engaging with those resources which provide spiritual nurture and engaging with the world through acts of compassion and justice. This more specific definition builds upon my earlier description of spirituality in which I affirmed

⁵⁰ O'Connor, 10-33.

that all persons, because they are spiritual beings, have a spirituality. Engaged spirituality, however, must be distinguished from other forms of spirituality which are in vogue these days, e.g., disembodied spiritualities which are unattached to any historical tradition and eclectic spiritualities which draw from a myriad of sources according to the practitioner's mood or the current cultural trend. Furthermore, the dual emphasis in engaged spirituality--cultivating both spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice--prevents a person from being snared by one of two traps common in the spiritual life. The first trap is the danger of accepting everything contained within one's religious tradition without critique, unaware of the ways in which its teachings and practices may have been distorted or misused throughout successive generations so that they are no longer consistent with their original intent. Persons must instead be empowered to re-connect with the roots of their tradition and even reinterpret its teachings and practices according to a perspective of compassion and justice engendered by being deeply involved in the concerns of the world. The second trap is the danger of becoming so engaged in the life of the world that one gets swept away by every spiritual message that "feels good" or "makes sense." Engagement with spiritual resources--the teachings and practices of a historic faith tradition--provides a standard by which these other spiritualities may be judged and offers a community of mutual guidance and challenge for those walking a similar spiritual path.

Engaged spirituality, because it presents an integrated approach to the spiritual life, is an expression of spiritual maturity. This means that it provides a fullness of religious experience which the cultivation of spiritual nurture or acts of compassion and justice alone cannot provide. When people believe that nurture and action are mutually exclusive or are taught by their religious tradition that one

is more important than the other, they end up developing only one dimension of the spiritual life: for instance, those who only seek a relationship with God through spiritual exercises may very well miss opportunities to enact God's vision for peace and justice in the world, while those who only seek to change oppressive societal structures are in need of the discernment and inner peace spiritual nurture provides.

Finally, engaged spirituality is a phenomenon which occurs in all religious traditions and cultures throughout the world. The Hindu Mahatma Gandhi, the Christian Martin Luther King Jr., and the Jew Elie Wiesel all exemplify engaged spiritualities, deeply rooted as they are in their own particular religious traditions and consciously in conversation with the circumstances of their own particular times and places in history. Because of its expression across religious lines, it is possible for those aspiring to cultivate an engaged spirituality to learn from these and other exemplars who engage the spiritual resources of their own tradition and engage in acts of compassion and justice, even when those exemplars represent a religious tradition other than their own. In fact, I believe that a Christian committed to engaged spirituality will feel a stronger affinity to a Buddhist who lives an engaged spirituality than to a nominally-committed Christian who does not make the development of her spiritual life a priority.

Shortly, we will learn more about the development and nurture of engaged spirituality by investigating the lives of two fascinating exemplars. Because the ultimate goal of this project is to determine how Christian congregations can capture a sense of this engaged spirituality and teach its principles, the next inquiry must determine the ways in which the existing literature on Christian religious education addresses the existence of and seeks to nurture a Christian engaged spirituality, this way of living religiously by engaging the

spiritual resources of Christian tradition and engaging in acts of compassion and justice for the life of the world.

CHAPTER 2

EDUCATING FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: EITHER/OR OR BOTH/AND?

Greg is a fifty-five year-old aeronautical engineer living in Houston. Although he grew up Southern Baptist, his spiritual path has led him to become a practicing Zen Buddhist. Two years ago he felt called to community service. After much thought and investigation, he received training as a hospice volunteer and now provides compassionate care to terminally ill patients who are in the last days of their lives. Recently, Greg was experiencing distress and exhaustion as a result of his hospice responsibilities. Feeling confused and uncertain about his activities, he turned to his Zen meditation teacher for guidance. The teacher, after listening to Greg's concerns, offered these words of wisdom: "In order to be successful in any type of service, you first have to scratch off the old paint." Greg understood this to mean that before he could discover how to be most helpful to others, he first had to spend time in meditation to better understand who he is at his deepest core and why he has chosen to reach out in service to others. Inspired by this teaching, Greg found renewed energy for his daily meditation practice and his hospice duties.

Christine is thirty-six years old, the single mother of three children, and a Quaker. She has a lively concern for the social problems which plague nations, cities and communities. She is an avid reader in social commentary about places as diverse as Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, and the inner city of Los Angeles. Her belief is that these problems are issues of "spirituality and social action"; Christine

contends that the people of the world are searching for meaning and are looking for ways to creatively meet the challenges of hunger, poverty, war and homelessness. Taking to heart the Quaker teaching "you shall be known by your deeds," she actively devotes her time and prayers to social concerns. Bringing her children to Quaker meeting, they sit in silence, believing that this is the best way to discern God's will for their lives and the life of the world.

These two vignettes juxtapose spiritual nurture, acts of compassion and justice, and the educational function of the community of faith. These two individuals recognize the unmistakable overlapping of practices which lead to the deepening of the inner life and activities which address the concerns of the social scene. They also both conscientiously seek to walk this spiritual path and expectantly look to their religious traditions for guidance and support. I believe that they *should* be able to turn to their faith communities to find the direction they seek. Sadly, too many congregational religious education programs fail to make the connection between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, between the inward and outward aspects of the spiritual journey. Even more, very few writers in the theory of Christian religious education make this connection as well. Without the support of theory and practice in the integration of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, congregations will continue to find it difficult to teach and model this holistic perspective to those persons looking to them for spiritual formation.

To demonstrate the inadequacy of Christian religious educational theory in addressing the relationship between providing spiritual nurture and encouraging acts of compassion and justice, I will presently conduct three critical surveys: First, I review theorists in Christian

religious education whose main focus is to educate for spiritual formation. These writers place emphasis on spirituality, Christian nurture, and growing into the image of Christ. These theories are typically accompanied by certain practices, such as prayer, contemplation, worship, and partaking of the sacraments. The second survey consists of theorists in Christian religious education who seek to educate primarily for commitment to social justice. Here the emphasis is on social transformation and social change, acts of compassion, and Christian mission. Education for social justice calls for concrete action, e.g., working in a soup kitchen, advocating on behalf of the homeless, and marching in protest demonstrations. The third survey includes those theorists who seek to integrate spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice and who suggest some ways to model and facilitate this integration in a community of faith and in the lives of people of faith.

There are several critiques that I raise throughout this survey. One is the tendency among theorists to view spiritual formation as a personal pursuit (albeit within the community of faith) which centers primarily upon developing a relationship between oneself and God, while seeing the justice emphasis as only oriented toward the social realm, as the doing of God's work in the world. There are two substantial problems with this point of view: first, a tendency to suggest that one side or the other--spirituality or social action--is more important or more necessary than the other; and second, a refusal to see the interrelationship between the two.

Other critiques are suggested by this insistence upon distinguishing too sharply between spiritual formation and social justice. Although many religious educators note the interrelationship between the two, few actually develop it in any substantive way. This, I contend, is the result of their limited understanding of what

constitutes "spirituality," tending to define it in privatistic ways, believing it includes prayer, Bible study and worship only, and not envisioning the ways in which caring for the sick, advocating for the poor and empowering the oppressed are also essential aspects of spirituality.

Certainly, some of these theorists do see the relationship between providing spiritual nurture and facilitating acts of compassion and justice. Unfortunately, they fail to fully integrate these two dimensions of the spiritual life because they insist on viewing one emphasis through the perspective of the other. Some examples of this tendency include the esteemed educator who says that action should be informed by reflection and regularly brought to prayer,¹ and the writer on spiritual formation who reminds educators of the need to cultivate a relationship to the wider world.²

The third survey showcases those theorists who seek to formulate a more integrated approach to religious education, one which both articulates the relationship between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice and demonstrates how they can be combined in practical and meaningful ways. Although these integrated theories provide a solid foundation for the type of religious education I envision, there is still something missing, namely, the study of spiritually-grounded, socially active exemplars. That is, religious education which nurtures an engaged spirituality must include observation of, interaction with, and reflection on the lived experience of those persons whose lives include attention to both spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. I will develop these critiques more fully as this chapter progresses.

¹ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 406.

² Iris V. Cully, *Education for Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 99.

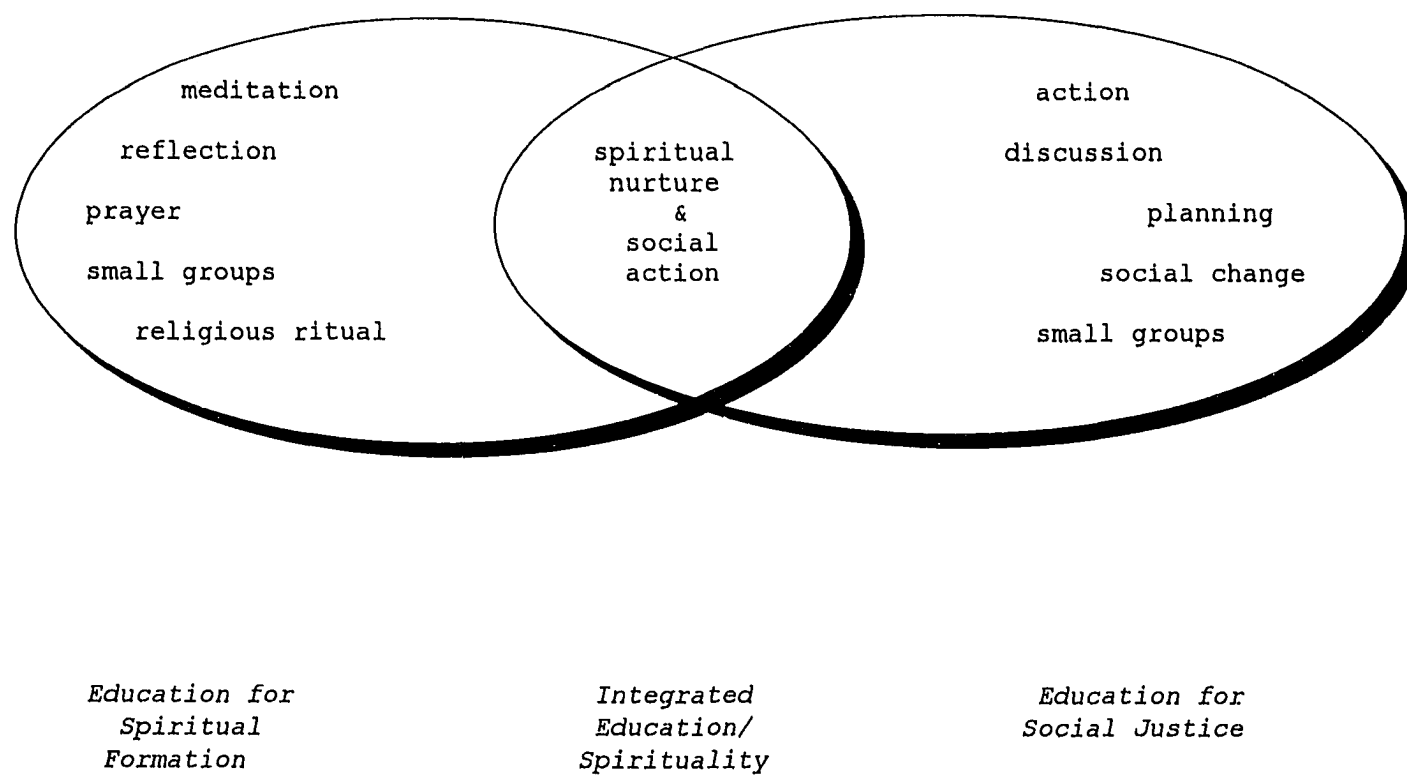
For now, let me demonstrate how the present options describing education for spiritual formation and social justice can be envisioned as two overlapping circles (see Fig. 1). The vast majority of those writing in spiritual formation are clustered in the large part of the circle on the left, tending to teach prayer, reflection, meditation, and small group work to the exclusion of social action and justice concerns. Similarly, most educators interested primarily in social justice would find themselves located in the large portion of the circle on the right, for they emphasize social change, planning, and active ministry while downplaying the call to prayer and devotional practice. Finally, some educators are more integrative of spiritual formation and social justice, thus earning them a place in the center of the diagram where the two circles overlap.

This diagram guides my discussion of the pertinent literature in religious education, allowing me to draw attention to the strengths and limitations of the various theories. My overall concern for the integration of spiritual nurture and social activism provides the parameters. I look first at education for spiritual formation, then at education for social justice, in each case determining the extent to which the writers maintain a healthy dialectic between nurture and action. The section which follows includes a description and critique of those theories which are most successful in maintaining this dialectic.

Christian Religious Education for Spiritual Formation

When looking through the lens of engaged spirituality, literature in Christian religious education which educates for spiritual formation can easily be divided into three categories: those which emphasize spiritual nurture with little or no emphasis on acts of compassion and

Fig. 1. The relationship between spiritual formation and social justice concerns in Christian religious education literature.



justice; those which stress primarily spiritual nurture and provide some impetus toward action; and those which are integrative of these two dimensions of spirituality. I will describe and critique the first two types here, and will take up the third group in a later section.

Several theorists develop the nurturing dimension of spirituality without giving much attention to the socially active element. Roy B. Zuck writes about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the context of evangelical Christian education. Three factors are absolutely necessary for effective education: study and correct interpretation of the Bible, conversion of teachers and students, and the work of the Holy Spirit, who guides and empowers both the teaching and the learning.³ The laws of teaching and learning are created by God; all that humans can endeavor to do is seek to learn and cultivate them in their own lives. Doing so creates the opportunity for the Holy Spirit to direct the teaching and learning so that all believers may grow toward Christian maturity, i.e., toward living Christ-centered lives.⁴ Zuck's theory clearly demonstrates an evangelical emphasis on personal regeneration, an individualistic approach which all but ignores the social dimensions of spirituality.

This theme is repeated in the work of Rachel Henderlite who describes the Holy Spirit as "God present and active in the world today."⁵ The human being is spirit, even as God is Spirit, with the capacity for both self-consciousness and self-transcendence. Unlike God, however, human beings are created spirit, ever dependent upon the Creator. True human fulfillment comes through entering into communion with God, but full communion with God can only occur when persons cease

³ Roy B. Zuck, *The Holy Spirit in Your Teaching: The Relationship that Makes All the Difference*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1984), 11-20.

⁴ Ibid., 98-100, 151.

⁵ Rachel Henderlite, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Education* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 20.

seeking their own fulfillment and turn to God by making a personal decision for Christ.⁶ Because faith is solely a gift from God, Christian education comprises the church's work in enabling people to respond to God through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁷ Again, the emphasis is on personal conversion, not social involvement.

Another evangelical perspective comes from Les L. Steele, who offers what he calls "a practical theology of Christian formation." Affirming that Christian identity is to be shaped primarily by Scripture and Christian tradition and only partially by psychological insights, he believes that maturity is the goal of Christian formation. Maturity takes two forms: holiness, which is the result of religious maturity, and wholeness, the result of psychological maturity.⁸ Christian formation provides a process for integrating religious and psychological maturity so that persons may live the Gospel, i.e., become responsible, self-disciplined, stable, and integrated selves.⁹ Like the two other evangelical perspectives, Christian conversion figures prominently. Conversion, however, is not heralded as a goal of Christian formation in Steele's theory as it is in the other two; instead, conversion is placed in tandem with nurture as the two most important elements of the process of Christian formation.¹⁰ But just like the prior two writers, personal religious experience is explored to the exclusion of social activism.

The Alban Institute provides resources for individual and congregational spiritual growth from a progressive Christian perspective. Two books are representative of this work. First, Thomas P. Williamsen lists three aspects of spirituality: prayer, worship and study.¹¹ He believes that the primary role of the congregation is to

⁶ Ibid., 21-22, 25.

⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁸ Les L. Steele, *On the Way: A Practical Theology of Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 10, 105.

⁹ Ibid., 108.

¹⁰ Ibid., 120-22.

¹¹ Thomas P. Williamsen, *Attending Parishioners' Spiritual Growth*

assist persons to grow in their faith, to develop greater intimacy with God, and to deepen their love for God, others, and themselves.¹² The work of the congregation is "sanctification," bringing each person's intellect, emotions and will in line with the intellect, emotions and will of God. The educational program accomplishes this through the training of the head--Bible study, reading the classics of the Christian faith and doctrine, discussion of Christian ethics, and practice in the method of prayer--and through the transforming of the heart--developing intimacy with God through participation in retreat, prayer vigils and prolonged times of silence.¹³

A second Alban Institute resource is authored by John Ackerman. He lays out an eight-week program called "Beginning Again," whose primary aim is to awaken people to the reality of God and empower them to develop a vital relationship with their Creator in the midst of a supportive, inclusive community of faith.¹⁴ Taking a more psychologically-oriented approach than Williamsen, Ackerman demonstrates the close connection between spiritual growth and psychological development, and offers an extended discussion of the relationships among personality and temperament on the one hand, and spiritual interests and prayer types on the other.¹⁵ With their emphases on psychological type and personal spiritual growth, these resources do little to further the integration of spiritual nurture and social action.

A similar critique could be directed at Paul Roy's book *Building Christian Communities for Justice*. Despite the promising title, Roy's program for faith sharing--called "The Faith Experience"--organizes

(Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 1997), 27.

¹² Ibid., xi.

¹³ Ibid., 28-39.

¹⁴ John Ackerman, *Spiritual Awakening: A Guide to Spiritual Life in Congregations* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 1994), viii.

¹⁵ Ibid., 40-47, 73, 110.

Christians into groups for personal and communal prayer, discussion, reflection, Bible study, participation in reconciliation and Eucharist, and informal fellowship gatherings.¹⁶ Although portions of the program explore the biblical call for justice and its ramifications for personal faith and the life of the church, The Faith Experience provides no opportunities for social activism.

While these resources for Christian spiritual growth offer little or no exploration of the social dimensions of spirituality, there is another group of spiritual formation resources which does encourage the reader to actively consider the role of social action in living the Christian faith. Spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice are not integrated in these resources, however; these writers take as their primary goal the growth of spirituality--what I have called spiritual nurture--but have also affirmed that acts of compassion and justice can be an important outgrowth of that spirituality.

A good example of this type of work is found in Iris V. Cully's *Education for Spiritual Growth*. Growth in spirituality is a process by which persons learn from the example of others engaged in the spiritual quest and from the various components which comprise the Christian tradition.¹⁷ Spiritual growth must always begin in openness to God, but the congregation can nurture it through many different means: reading Bible stories, enjoyment of hymns and religious poetry, meditation on the creeds, intellectual study, worship, spiritual retreat, and reaching out to the world in mission.¹⁸ Cully clearly intends "spiritual life" to refer to the life of prayer, retreats, and liturgy; she does, however, suggest that cultivation of these spiritual resources can lead

¹⁶ Paul J. Roy, *Building Christian Communities for Justice* (New York: Paulist, 1981), 3-5.

¹⁷ Cully, 27-31.

¹⁸ Ibid., 36, 95-100.

one to warmly embrace a larger circle--whole nations, the natural world, and even other religious traditions.¹⁹

Padraic O'Hare believes that the purpose of religious education in person's lives is the formation of contemplative being.²⁰ Contemplative being is "the presence or mindfulness which arises from concentration and leads to understanding, composure or calmness, and finally silence or stillness."²¹ Although the journey toward contemplative being is a very personal one, it is not as individualistic as it may seem at first glance; the cultivation of contemplative being leads one to recognize the interconnectedness of all being, manifesting itself as compassion for all.²² While O'Hare gives a narrow focus to what constitutes the spiritual life--concentrating primarily on prayer and silence, for instance--he assumes that immersion in this way of life would naturally lead one to live and act in compassionate ways.

Marcel Dumestre's work is concerned with what he calls "spiritual education," comprised of "intentional meaning-making and value-laden learning."²³ This writer's understanding of spirituality is quite different from that of the other theorists recounted here; his concept of spiritual growth is much closer to what I would term "faith development."²⁴ Dumestre explains that spiritual education is comprised of five interrelated factors: critical consciousness, understood as the ability to experience, understand, judge and decide for oneself;²⁵ an

¹⁹ Ibid., 172-74.

²⁰ Padraic O'Hare, *The Way of Faithfulness: Contemplation and Formation in the Church* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1993), 23.

²¹ Ibid., 6.

²² Ibid., 19-20.

²³ Marcel J. Dumestre, *A Church at Risk: The Challenge of Spiritually Hungry Adults* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 87-88.

²⁴ "Meaning" and "value," for example, are the categories James Fowler uses in his classic work on faith development. See James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1981).

²⁵ Although he uses a phrase made popular by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, Dumestre's use of the term "critical consciousness" is quite different: Conscientization, or critical consciousness, as understood by Freire, is the ability to reflect critically upon the social, political

authentic community, in which people hold experiences, understandings and judgments in common; prophetic action, the means for enabling the community to live according to its highest values; institutional identity, an understanding of how and why the institution educates its members and the larger community; and spiritual growth, a lifelong process of finding answers to life's deepest questions.²⁶ In the final analysis, Dumestre defines the terms "spiritual growth" and "action" more narrowly than I do, and while nurture and action are both a part of his educational program, he does not explore the relationship between the two.

James Bryan Smith offers a seven-week course in spiritual growth which draws from five spiritual traditions exemplified by the life of Jesus: the contemplative tradition based on his close relationship with God; the holiness tradition based on his virtuous life; the charismatic tradition based on his reliance upon the Spirit; the social justice tradition based on his compassionate care for all people; and the evangelical tradition based on his mission to offer salvation to all. The course provides detailed descriptions of each tradition so that participants can discover which traditions feel most comfortable to them. They are also encouraged to participate in practices from unfamiliar traditions as a means for broadening their spiritual repertoire.²⁷ While Smith's program recognizes social justice as a viable expression of spirituality, it does not integrate the five traditions in any constructive way.

and economic realities of one's place in history, and to act to overcome oppression in that context. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1993), chap. 3 passim.

²⁶ Dumestre, 91-105.

²⁷ James Bryan Smith, *Spiritual Formation Workbook: Small Group Resources for Nurturing Christian Growth*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 15-18.

Another book focusing on spiritual formation is the edited volume *Practicing Our Faith*. This book describes various Christian practices, defined as "shared activities that address fundamental human needs and that, woven together, form a way of life."²⁸ Rather than focusing on what might be considered traditional spiritual practices, such as prayer or worship, the authors recount various everyday practices which serve as reminders of God's presence in and ongoing concern for life in all its simplicity and complexity.²⁹ Several of the chapters address issues of compassionate care and social justice as well, such as hospitality, household economics, testimony, forgiveness, and healing, although there is no systematic attempt to explore the interrelationship between the nurturing and socially active aspects of spiritual expression.

While not offering a full integration of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, this last group of resources begins to move in that direction. The understanding of spirituality demonstrated by these writers focuses on the quiet, personal, and contemplative aspects of faith expression. The authors presented at the end of this review begin to demonstrate a greater awareness of how acts of compassion and justice provide depth and fullness to one's spiritual life. Now it is possible to explore how successful the literature discussing Christian education for social justice is in presenting a more holistic vision of the spiritual life.

Christian Religious Education for Social Justice

The literature in Christian religious education which seeks to educate toward social justice contains theories which fall into three categories similar to the ones found in the spiritual formation literature: first, the action/reflection models of social justice;

²⁸ Dorothy C. Bass, et al., ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), xi.

²⁹ Ibid., 8.

second, the social justice models which seek to incorporate some aspects of spiritual nurture in the service of social action; and third, those theories which seek to integrate nurture and action. A discussion of the first two groups follows, while the integrated models are described in the next section of this chapter.

The first group of theories are the action/reflection models of education for social justice. Many of these have as their starting point Paulo Freire's concepts of conscientization, humanization, dialogue, and a problem-posing method of education.³⁰ The main thrust of these theories is action directed toward social change or transformation, combined with ongoing reflection upon the action. Freire refers to this process as "praxis."³¹ These theories maintain a dialectic between reflection and action, between theory and practice. With but a few exceptions, however, they do not include spiritual nurture as a part of the reflective process. Overall, these theorists stress the cognitive processes of theoretical inquiry and discussion with little attention to the more affective practices of prayer, worship, contemplation, and discernment.

A good place to begin is with Freire himself who, in an article entitled "Education, Liberation and the Church," makes the case for liberative education in the church. He declares that the church, by virtue of its position in society and existence as a historical entity, is not neutral with regard to politics or the prevailing social situation. Either the church stands in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, or it supports the status quo; there is no middle ground.³² In contrast to the traditionalist church, which feeds the people platitudes about a transcendent salvation, and the modernizing church,

³⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 25-30, 68-74, 60-67.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 106-10.

³² Paulo Freire, "Education, Liberation and the Church," in *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, trans. Donaldo Macedo (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1985), 121-22.

which encourages the masses to rise up the social ladder without ever challenging the imbalance of power between the elite and the poor, the prophetic church declares that salvation has come this day to the people and commits itself to radical social change. Education within the prophetic church aims at both a change of consciousness in the people and radical change of social structures. The leaders of this revolution are not the members of the power elite, but the people themselves, empowered to critically reflect upon their concrete situation and to act with courage and hope.³³ Although he state that there is "no separation between transcendence and liberation,"³⁴ Freire is not referring to the relationship between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, but rather to an intellectual form of transcendence which allows one to reflect upon the current social situation in such a way that one may act in accordance with what is required.

Thomas Groome's way of "shared Christian praxis" offers the clearest attempt by a Christian religious educator to appropriate Freire's educational model for use in the church. Participants are led through a process in which they critically reflect upon their own sociohistorical situation in light of the Christian tradition in order to re-commit themselves to actions which support the in-breaking of the realm of God.³⁵ Note that the entire process moves toward action, so that all critical reflection and study support this movement. Groome describes an "inclusive spirituality," one which incorporates the biblical understanding of holiness as right relationship with God and justice as right relationship with others. His concern for peace and justice--what he believes to be God's main concern as well--colors his understanding of spirituality, for both holiness and justice are ultimately judged by their action component, i.e., by the way in which

³³ Ibid., 131-40.

³⁴ Ibid., 138.

³⁵ Groome, 135.

persons live their lives.³⁶ In this way, contemplative practices are relegated to a peripheral place in the pursuit of the spiritual life; prayer is viewed only as a resource which can guide and inform one's action.³⁷

Five other educational models based on Freire's work are worthy of note here. All were developed for use with First World Christians. Suzanne Toton believes that religious educators have a dual responsibility--to develop critical consciousness in themselves and their students, and to act toward transforming unjust political, economic and social structures.³⁸ Her methodology for creating critical consciousness and encouraging action toward the problem of world hunger includes sensitization to the reality of hunger, an evaluation of theories about world hunger, exploration of how the international economic order is biased toward the First World, and a determination of what Christians' moral responsibilities entail in light of this information.³⁹

Brian Wren finds that education for justice requires the development of critical consciousness, which he defines as helping persons to become fully conscious subjects who believe they have the power to change their own social situation.⁴⁰ The best way to accomplish this is through a dialogue model of education in which persons mull over in their minds and discuss with one another their different experiences and viewpoints. People who honestly participate

³⁶ Ibid., 391-93.

³⁷ Ibid., 406.

³⁸ Suzanne C. Toton, *World Hunger: The Responsibility of Christian Education* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982), 147.

³⁹ Ibid., 154-57. Toton's theories on action which can lead to constructive structural change are developed more fully in two of her articles: "Structural Change: The Next Step in Justice Education," *Religious Education* 80 (summer 1985): 447-59, and "Moving Beyond Anguish to Action: What Has Saul Alinsky to Say to Justice Education?" *Religious Education* 88 (summer 1993): 478-93.

⁴⁰ Brian Wren, *Education for Justice: Pedagogical Principles* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1977), 7.

in this process soon come to realize that they may be knowledgeable about some things, but are decidedly ignorant about others. Conflict is created, thus highlighting the injustice of an inequality of power in society. Finally, an awakening is assisted, as critical consciousness is born.⁴¹

William B. Kennedy's method of education for a just and peaceful world involves placing the reality of the present social situation in conversation with the Christian tradition, particularly the biblical witness of peace and justice. He calls this a "hermeneutical circle" in which persons not only see what God has done and wants done among the people, but also are emboldened to work with God to accomplish it.⁴² The aim of this educational program is an attitudinal change which results in behavioral change, i.e., a new consciousness that leads one to engage in social action.⁴³

Daniel Schipani calls for church education which integrates this-worldly and other-worldly concerns and which boldly proclaims its solidarity with the poor and oppressed.⁴⁴ Since this is the gospel message of the reign of God, the work of the church should enable people to make this message their own; religious education must foster discipleship, promote social transformation toward the realization of God's reign in human history, nurture persons in their knowledge and love of God, and empower persons to live this service-oriented lifestyle in the context of Christian community.⁴⁵

Freire's work also makes an appearance in a book by Mary Elizabeth Moore, in which she seeks to "re-form" conscientization by placing it in

⁴¹ Ibid., 12-13, 27, 65, 79.

⁴² William B. Kennedy, "Education for a Just and Peaceful World," *Religious Education* 79 (fall 1984), 551.

⁴³ William B. Kennedy, "The Ideological Captivity of the Non-Poor," in *Pedagogies for the Non-Poor*, ed. Alice Frazer Evans, et al. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987), 245-47.

⁴⁴ Daniel S. Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1988), 45-46.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 99-100.

conversation with process theology. Because process theology begins with the premise of the interrelationship of God and the world, it is an organic theology, one which refuses to separate the transcendent from the mundane.⁴⁶ From this perspective, consciousness-raising serves the purpose not just of convincing one of the need to act, but also of recognizing one's connection to the entire world, both human and non-human. The perception of reality takes on a layered effect as persons begin to see the diversity and complexity contained within the variety of situations encountered in the past, present and future, as well as in numerous locales all over the world. Persons can then be encouraged to see multiple needs as well as multiple solutions in any given situation.⁴⁷ Moore provides a unique and much-needed expansion of Freire's pedagogical theory to include both a personal sense of interconnectedness and the realization that care for the non-human world is just as important as concern for human needs.

So far I have discussed the action/reflection models of education for social justice which are based largely or in part on the work of Paulo Freire. None of these proposals includes a discussion of spiritual nurture or a detailed analysis of how even contemplative practices might support the pursuit of peace and justice. Turning now to some additional action/reflection models which are not based explicitly on Freire's work, I note that his influence is strongly sensed in these theories as well. And just like the other writers, these persons do not express educational concern for spiritual nurture in conjunction with their emphasis on social justice.

Mary C. Boys describes religious education as "the making accessible of the traditions of the religious community and the making manifest of the intrinsic connection between traditions and

⁴⁶ Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 181-90.

transformation."⁴⁸ She sees education as a profoundly political activity: through the appropriation and investigation of the traditions of their religious community people are inspired to envision the world as it could be; then, through the reinterpretation of that same tradition, they are impelled to act to bring this world into existence.⁴⁹ Implicit in her understanding of religious education seems to be the notion that all aspects of one's tradition, including spiritual nurture, help shape one's outlook and inner development, although Boys does not clearly spell out the connection.

A resource called *Pedagogies for the Non-Poor* describes and evaluates numerous interesting and innovative educational programs developed for use with middle-class, First World Christians.⁵⁰ In a concluding chapter, Robert A. Evans sums up the qualities of "transformative education": firmly founded on biblical concepts such as equal access to the necessities of life, God's solidarity with the poor, and emancipation from ideologies which oppress, transformative education develops "a new map of reality," one which seeks justice and equity for all.⁵¹ Transformation is the result of a clear pedagogical pattern: raising awareness and squarely facing the problems one perceives; maintaining the restlessness by feeling deeply the frustration caused by the awareness of oppression; sustaining the biblical vision of peace and justice; countering controlling ideology by embracing a liberating theology; and reinventing power so that it can be used in the service of God's will.⁵² Like the other resources I have evaluated so far, this

⁴⁸ Mary C. Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 193.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 193-212.

⁵⁰ Alice Frazer Evans, et al., ed., *Pedagogies for the Non-Poor* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987).

⁵¹ Robert A. Evans, "Education for Emancipation: Movement Toward Transformation," in *Pedagogies for the Non-Poor*, ed. Alice Frazer Evans, et al. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987), 258-64.

⁵² Ibid., 265-74.

one gives almost no attention to spiritual nurture, except as an occasional partner in the quest for social justice.

The Justice/Peace Education Council of the Roman Catholic Church has also developed a resource whose aim is to enable persons to grow in social responsibility and bring about structural change as a means for effecting real social transformation.⁵³ Their educational method involves extensive structural analysis and cultural critique as well as the development of conflict resolution and cooperation skills. They vigorously advocate what they call "infusion," or interjecting peace and justice concepts into other areas of the curriculum, such as spirituality, scripture, liturgy and sacraments.⁵⁴ While not explicitly integrating spiritual nurture and social justice concerns, this resource at least uses some contemplative elements to further its social action emphasis.

A similar critique is in order for Charles R. McCullough's *Notebook on Christian Education for Social Change*. Education for social change, he says, requires methodologies which raise awareness, increase knowledge, strengthen abilities, and solidify commitment so that persons will engage in social change activities.⁵⁵ He recognizes four levels of learning: the affective, or emotional, level; the cognitive, or intellectual, level; the active level; and the votive, or religious devotional, level, comprised of reflection, prayer, music, art, dance, worship and ritual.⁵⁶ Of all the theorists engaged so far, McCullough gives the most prominent place to spiritual nurture, but, like all the others, sees spirituality as a means to an end--the pursuit of social

⁵³ Justice/Peace Education Council, *Dimensions of Justice and Peace in Religious Education* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1989), 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 23-35, 37.

⁵⁵ Charles R. McCullough, *Morality of Power: A Notebook on Christian Education for Social Change* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1977), 14.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

change--rather than exploring how spiritual nurture and the pursuit of social justice can be mutually supportive and transformative.

In addition to the action/reflection models for social justice, there is a second, smaller, but equally important group of models which aim toward social justice, social change or transformation, and incorporate some elements of spiritual nurture, such as discernment, prayer, and worship. What differentiates these writers from the writers in spiritual formation who incorporate an action element into their theories is one of perspective: these social justice writers note the ways in which contemplative pursuits can guide or enhance one's involvement in social action, while the spiritual formation writers maintain that contemplative practice is a prerequisite for social action.

The first of these books is Dieter T. Hessel's *Social Ministry*. Hessel envisions congregational ministry which combines spiritual meaning and social action by fully developing eight aspects of church life: liturgy and preaching, education, pastoral care and counseling, lay ministry, social service, community organization and development, public policy action, and a system of corporate responsibility. Such a vision can allow persons to see the connections between public and private faith, between corporate and individual action, and between prophetic and pastoral activity.⁵⁷ Christian education facilitates this process by inviting individuals into serious reflection which results in action. The emphasis here is on the actual doing of ministry and on faithful living which finds expression in all aspects of church life.⁵⁸ When Hessel writes of the integration of "spirituality and social action" he falls into the trap of narrowly defining spirituality as privatized religion which excludes activities of social justice. What

⁵⁷ Dieter T. Hessel, *Social Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 21-25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 109-12.

he means by integration is really the support that spiritual pursuits like worship and pastoral care can provide for what he considers to be the more important pursuit--social ministry.

John L. Elias displays this bias as well when he describes his understanding of a liberating religious education. It is characterized by immersion in the life of the people it seeks to educate, dialogue among participants, empowering persons to develop according to their own timetable and needs, increasing awareness of the problems of the world and one's responsibility to respond to them, and engaging in political acts which seek to end injustice. These aims are supported by the cultivation of a spiritual life which loves, honors and appreciates others, thereby providing the impetus to act in loving and just ways.⁵⁹ Challenging what he believes to be an overemphasis on mystical and ascetical spiritualities, Elias suggests a liberation spirituality which highlights the social dimensions of scripture and Christian teaching; links prayer, worship and social action; and prophetically challenges all worldly institutions, including the church.⁶⁰ Rather than detailing a spirituality which incorporates both mystical and liberation elements, this writer chooses to see these as two different types of spirituality, thereby revealing his bias toward liberation.

Robert W. Pazmiño bases his concept of transformative Christian education for First World Christians on what he learned during his travels in Latin America. Transformation involves both personal conversion and the fervent desire to change society, enabling both individual and corporate life to be brought under the will and reign of God.⁶¹ Earlier I mentioned Pazmiño's educational trinity of information, formation and transformation. This educational process

⁵⁹ John L. Elias, *Studies in Theology and Education* (Malabar, Fla.: Robert E. Krieger, 1986), 164-72.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 198-200.

⁶¹ Pazmiño, 55-59.

must take place in the context of the Christian community, called by God to carry out five tasks: preaching and proclamation, service, community-building, prophetic activity, and worship. Worship is placed at the center of congregational life, with the other four tasks spiraling around it. Worship, understood as including both corporate worship and a personal sense of God's presence, is central because of its ability to integrate all aspects of church life.⁶² There is, however, no indication of how one may cultivate this sense of the presence of God, nor how such an experience might enhance or impel one toward acts of compassion and justice.

In a short but significant article, Margaret Brennan explores the relationship between spirituality and social responsibility. Affirming that spirituality is the way that a person relates to God in all aspects of his or her life, she asks "How should the church provide spiritual formation in the context of justice?"⁶³ The fact that Brennan's primary focus is justice is demonstrated in the very way she phrases this question. She does suggest, however, that the church should seek to expand its definition of spirituality to include a public, corporate dimension in addition to an awareness of God's presence and activity in everyday life.⁶⁴ While not fully integrating spiritual nurture and social justice, Brennan's thoughts inch closer to that goal.

The last resource to be discussed in this section is *The Empowerment Process* by Mary Ellen Durbin and associates. This educational program is definitely directed toward social action, but also incorporates contemplative practices, a form of spiritual nurture. The Empowerment Process has four components: education so that persons

⁶² Ibid., 61-63, 73.

⁶³ Margaret Brennan, "Sing a New Song unto the Lord: The Relationship between Spirituality and Social Responsibility," in *Education for Peace and Justice*, ed. Padraic O'Hare, et al. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 213, 216.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 216-18.

will have a firm grasp on biblical and church teachings on social justice; service to alleviate the effects of social problems; action and advocacy to challenge the structural causes of social problems; and empowerment so that the oppressed can effectively tackle their own problems.⁶⁵ This process is to be carried out in the context of regular prayer and discernment of the Spirit. The community of faith participates in spiritually nurturing practices such as Bible reading, singing, faith sharing, prayer and reflection. This resource also includes prayer services on justice themes to be used throughout the life of the program in the local congregation.⁶⁶ The Empowerment Process takes very seriously the importance of spiritual nurture in the life of the individual Christian and harnesses its power in the service of social ministry.

Educational Theories Which Integrate Spiritual Nurture and Acts of Compassion and Justice

While the vast majority of Christian religious educators write from either a spiritual formation or social justice perspective, there are some who consciously attempt to emphasize both spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice in their theories. Some of these writers fall into the trap of narrowly-defining spirituality to include only contemplative activities, thereby creating a dichotomy between nurture and action; others embrace a notion of spiritual formation which incorporates both the inner and outer forms of religious expression, both spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. None of these theories, however, are derived from the lives of spiritual exemplars, persons who have fervently sought to live lives which combine nurture and action. In the descriptions which lie ahead, I demonstrate

⁶⁵ Mary Ellen Durbin, et al., *The Empowerment Process: Centering Social Ministry in the Life of the Local Christian Community* (New York: Paulist, 1994), 1-2.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 105.

that, except for one writer whose ideas were formed and refined in the context of the real experiences of a Christian congregation in New York City, these writers do not investigate the lived experience of persons for whom prayer and liberation, nurture and action, are integral to the way they live their spiritualities. Without this investigation of what a holistic spirituality looks like--and how persons can be empowered to actually live it--theories about Christian religious education become too theoretical and present a lifestyle many people feel to be outside their reach. The study and observation of real life experience demonstrates that a holistic spirituality is not only possible, but essential, to living the Christian faith.

John Westerhoff is one of those writers who wants to express the importance of both inner growth and outer change, but who places more emphasis on the role of the inner aspects. In an early work he writes, "it is the unification of deeply personal religious experience and social prophetic action that remains at the heart of the Christian life."⁶⁷ He affirms that prayer is the unifying factor between piety and politics, between personal religion and social witness.⁶⁸ He concludes that book with a model which he says integrates religious experience and prophetic action. Unfortunately, his model does not live up to expectations: it includes an abundance of activities to nurture spiritual growth, such as retreat, prayer, meditation and Eucharist; some discussion of and reflection upon social needs; but few opportunities for real social action.⁶⁹

As time has progressed, Westerhoff's definition of spirituality has shifted even more toward an emphasis on nurturing religious faith. In a recent work, he describes the spiritual life as "ordinary, everyday life lived in an ever-deepening and loving relationship to God and

⁶⁷ Westerhoff, *Inner Growth, Outer Change*, 16.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁹ See Ibid., 65-163.

therefore to one's true or healthy self, all people, and the whole of creation."⁷⁰ Note that spirituality begins in one's personal relationship to God, then expands to include relationships to self, others, and the natural world. He emphatically affirms that the spiritual life, evidenced by love of God, always precedes the moral life, evidenced by love of neighbor.⁷¹

Another educator who exhibits a narrow understanding of spirituality is Suzanne M. De Benedittis. She is concerned with the relationship between faith and morals. Looking to the example of Jesus, who she says never separated the demands of faithful and moral living, she devises a theory of religious education that integrates discussion, action, prayer and solitude.⁷² Catechesis must attend to four domains of human living: the intellectual, comprised of thinking, critical reflection and understanding; the affective, harnessing one's passions and energies in the service of the life one seeks to live; the spiritual, connecting with the Transcendent through ritual, sacrament, liturgy and the cultivation of mystery; and the physical, evidenced by compassion and concern for oneself, others, and the entire physical world.⁷³ De Benedittis advocates what she calls a "holistic catechesis," one which begins wherever people are in their lives--whether persons are drawn more to intellectual pursuits, to the processing of feelings, to contemplative practices, or to practical service--and then encourages them to consider ways to incorporate the other three domains into their religious lives.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, her notion of the spiritual life is less holistic than her description of catechesis would suggest; she is determined to identify the spiritual

⁷⁰ John H. Westerhoff, *Spiritual Life: The Foundation for Preaching and Teaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 1.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Suzanne M. De Benedittis, *Teaching Faith and Morals: Catechesis for Personal and Community Renewal* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1981), xv.

⁷³ Ibid., 12-18.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 56-57.

domain with contemplative pursuits and the physical domain with action.⁷⁵ In her schema, spiritual nurture and social action are both part of the whole of religious experience, but she clearly separates them when she affirms that mysticism leads to social action, and not the other way around.⁷⁶

Letty Russell also recognizes the integration of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, but demonstrates a bias toward activism, toward what she calls "mission." The purpose of Christian education is to help develop the eyes of faith so that persons will recognize what God is doing in the world and respond to Christ's invitation to participate in God's mission in the world. She sees no substantive difference between the various activities of the Christian community, such as worship, education, ethics, beliefs or witness, for each of these activities represents a different way in which Christians respond to God's grace in community.⁷⁷ During her tenure as teacher and pastor at the East Harlem Protestant Parish, she discovered that the community of faith must develop disciplines--what she calls "habits of Christian living"--which enable people to be active participants in accomplishing God's mission. These disciplines address the needs of both nurture and social: the study of scripture to understand God's actions in history, participation in sacraments and service as a means for bringing God's action to the communion table and into the world, seeking ways to bring God's shalom to others, solidarity with brothers and sisters all over the world, and a secularity which insists that God's shalom is to be found in the world and not in some idealized setting.⁷⁸ Russell is not concerned with defining spirituality as much as she is with describing Christian lifestyle. That lifestyle is

⁷⁵ See *Ibid.*, 14-18.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁷ Letty M. Russell, *Christian Education in Mission* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 10-13.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 118-32.

primarily directed toward witness and service, but is buoyed by ongoing, diligent attention to spiritual nurture.

The first of three educators whose theories are more genuinely integrative of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice is Maria Harris. She describes the curriculum of the church as taking five forms: *kerygma*, or preaching and proclamation; *didache*, or teaching; *leiturgia*, or worship and celebration of Eucharist; *koinonia*, or community; and *diakonia*, or serving the needy. Education consists of fashioning and refashioning these forms. All are interrelated; all are necessary.⁷⁹ When talking specifically about prayer and justice, Harris states emphatically that the two cannot be separated from each other. In fact, the curriculum of *leiturgia* should "educate people to pray regularly in such a way that they become contemplative, reflective suppliants before God some times, holy doers of justice at others, and worshipping members of a worshipping community always."⁸⁰

In contrast to the majority of theorists we have encountered so far, Harris has a strongly integrative definition of spirituality: "our way of being in the world in light of the Mystery at the core of the universe."⁸¹ While this description does not specifically address the relationship between nurture and action, it clearly includes them both and does not highlight one at the expense of the other. Her understanding of Jubilee spirituality, for example, is based on the biblical teaching (Leviticus 25) that God has chosen to bless the 50th year. Five traditions arise out of that teaching: Sabbath rest, forgiveness, the proclamation of liberty, prophetic justice, and jubilation. Religious education, as well as spirituality, should include all of these: contemplative quiet, forgiveness, freedom,

⁷⁹ Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 16-17.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁸¹ Maria Harris, *Proclaim Jubilee! A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 75.

justice-making and the festivity of liturgy and worship.⁸² In this way, Harris actually breaks open the old dichotomy of contemplation and action by broadening the definition of Christian spirituality to include five elements in all; the very fact that Harris talks in multiple categories challenges traditional notions and lends a creative bent to her description of the spiritual journey. One piece that is missing from her work is an explanation of what this fully integrated spirituality might look like in the lives of real people. While she provides examples of persons who engage in forgiveness or who make justice their aim, she does not offer examples of persons who actually live the holistic spirituality she describes. Only by introducing us to exemplars could she convince her readers that Jubilee spirituality can become a reality in their lives.

A second writer whose educational approach is integrative of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice is Susanne Johnson. In comparison to Harris, her definition of spirituality is more explicit in its inclusion of these two: "spirituality is our self-transcendent capacity as human beings to recognize and to participate in God's creative and redemptive activity in all of creation."⁸³ The community of faith provides Christian spiritual formation through all that it is and does, but primarily through worship, instruction, and praxis. Worship is a rehearsal of the alternative vision of reality symbolized by the Realm of God, praxis is the community's action and reflection upon that action in service of the alternative vision, and instruction involves teaching the knowledge and skills necessary in order to participate in worship and praxis.⁸⁴ She, like Letty Russell, describes spiritual disciplines as habits of the heart which shape and define the

⁸² Ibid., 74.

⁸³ Susanne Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 22.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 143-46.

Christian way of life. Therefore, disciplines include all the activities necessary for participating in the Christian life: praying, meditating, repenting, loving and welcoming the stranger.⁸⁵ Highly critical of psychological development theories, she affirms that the aim of Christian spiritual formation is not strictly ego development, but spiritual development, i.e., that life in the Spirit which is the result of a maturity and transformation wrought by a transcendent power beyond the self.⁸⁶ Thus, the Christian spiritual journey can never be described as a personal pursuit, for it always starts and continues within the context of community. At the same time, however, spiritual formation is a highly personal process, as each individual person is conformed to the image of Christ through participation in community worship, instruction and praxis.⁸⁷

Johnson offers an educational model which provides more for spiritual formation than for spiritual nurture. Earlier I described formation as an intentional process which seeks to guide persons to embrace a particular set of values and lifestyle, while nurture is a more organic approach which combines internal inclinations toward the spiritual life and outside formative influences. Johnson clearly articulates the first model. Even more, with her distrust of psychological theories and strong emphasis on community, she views contemporary forms of spirituality as narcissistic and individualistic⁸⁸ and seems to reject all forms of spiritual nurture--particularly personal pursuits such as contemplation and meditation--which do not support her triad of worship, instruction and praxis. In addition, she, like Harris, fails to provide examples of persons who actually live the Christian life she describes. Without the witness of exemplars, her

⁸⁵ Ibid., 29, 55-62.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 108-11.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 103-04.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 17.

work remains a theoretical framework which needs to be tested in real life.

The last of the integrated perspectives is that of Parker Palmer who says that the spiritual quest is "to know 'the rapture of being alive' [from author Joseph Campbell] and to allow that knowledge to transform us into celebrants, advocates, and defenders of life wherever we find it."⁸⁹ The celebration of the gift of life stands not only at the center of his definition of spirituality, but also at the center of the activity which comprises spirituality for him, namely, contemplation-and-action. Rather than separate these two emphases, as most writers do, Palmer chooses to combine them into one word to suggest that both dimensions of the spiritual life arise from the same source and seek the same goal--aliveness. In this way they are a part of each other, inseparable. While some people might perceive of them as opposites, Palmer sees their relationship as paradoxical, meaning that on the surface they may look different, but upon deeper investigation one discovers that they are really one and the same. The challenge for educators is to uncover how to hold the two together gracefully without overemphasizing one and neglecting the other.⁹⁰

Palmer defines "contemplation" and "action" in such a way that the interrelation between the two is honored. Action is "any way that we can co-create reality with other beings and with the Spirit," and contemplation is "any way that we can unveil the illusions that masquerade as reality and reveal the reality behind the masks." Any time one acts to reveal truth, as in calling attention to the plight of the homeless, that action is contemplative; and any time one contemplates in such a way that life is revitalized and affirmed, as

⁸⁹ Parker J. Palmer, *The Active Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 8; and Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 5.

⁹⁰ Palmer, *Active Life*, 15.

when through meditation upon scripture one feels called to a new way of living, that contemplation is active. In this way, contemplation-and-action highlights the spiritual nature of ordinary, everyday activities like parenting, working, worshipping, volunteering and learning.⁹¹

Palmer's definitions of "contemplation" and "action" are more philosophical and less specific than the ones I offer for "spiritual nurture" and "acts of compassion and justice." What we do share, however, is the conviction that these two ways of interacting with the world are interrelated. While Palmer states that contemplation and action are, paradoxically, one and the same, I recognize that nurture and action are two aspects of the spiritual life. I believe that persons and communities should learn to see the mutual relationship between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice and then consciously seek to integrate them in their personal and communal pursuits. This intentional integration results in the experience and expression of a holistic spirituality such as one could never have if they cultivated spiritual nurture or social action alone.

I do appreciate Palmer's attempt to illustrate the spiritual depth he envisions by providing examples of persons pursuing lives of contemplation-and-action. The stories he uses, however, are not drawn primarily from real life, but rather from fictional and mythic accounts found in literature. While I agree with him that these varied accounts can provide a "complex, living, organic" vision of the spiritual life,⁹² I am concerned that such accounts present an idealized form of spirituality, one not unlike the theoretical formulations offered by Johnson and Harris. Again I must reaffirm my belief that persons seeking to live an integrated spirituality, one which both provides

⁹¹ Ibid., 17-18.

⁹² Ibid., 11.

spiritual nurture and encourages acts of compassion and justice, are in need of real life exemplars, i.e., persons who can point the way to a holistic spirituality by modeling this manner of living, working, reflecting, and acting.

This, then, is the quandary with which I end this inquiry: What assistance do these numerous writers offer the searchers we met at the beginning of the chapter? The vast majority of these theorists assume one dominant perspective, either educating for spiritual formation by giving primary attention to traditional contemplative disciplines like prayer, meditation, solitude and retreat, or educating for social justice by seeking to change human consciousness and encouraging direct action toward compassionate care and/or social transformation. Our poor searchers, seeking a middle way which incorporates both spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, are left wanting by what these one-sided theorists would offer them. Believing in the holistic nature of their quest, they would be confused by definitions of spirituality which talk only of silence and prayer and fail to take account of the outward expressions of the spiritual life.

If our searchers turned to the few writers who do support the intentional integration of spiritual formation and social justice, they would surely find descriptions of the spiritual life which are more in tune with their own religious sensibilities and the needs they sense in their own lives. I fear, however, that they would again be disappointed as they attempt to apply these theories to their own lives. Overall, these theories present a manner of life which seems idealized, even outside the reach of most persons. Who has striven to live the life of contemplative quiet, forgiveness, freedom, justice, and jubilation described by Maria Harris? What are the practical implications of Parker Palmer's notion of contemplation-and-action as both co-creating reality with other beings and with the Spirit and unveiling the

illusions that masquerade as reality? Spiritual seekers are in need of exemplars they can watch, admire, and emulate so that they too can be inspired, encouraged, and nurtured on their spiritual way. Unless these theories can describe a manner of life which is perceived as real and which can be verified by experience, they run the risk of being dismissed as too theoretical and out of touch with the real demands of everyday life.

Religious education carries out the task of spiritual formation by seeking to guide, nurture and support persons as they embrace a holistic spirituality which combines both inward and outward expressions, both the nurturing and active dimensions of the spiritual life. This is best accomplished by observing and learning from the lives of persons who have lived or are living this holistic, integrated lifestyle. A method for educating for an engaged spirituality would ideally flow from an investigation of such lives. For this reason, I conduct a thorough study of two exemplars--Roman Catholic Dorothy Day and Zen Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh--for the purpose of discovering what can be learned from their life stories, historical contexts, and religious affiliations to develop religious education that models and nurtures a spirituality which both engages those resources which nurture spiritual depth and empowers deep immersion in the cares of a hurting world.

The Interpretive Biographical Research Method

The biographical research method involves collecting and studying life documents in search of turning point events in people's lives. Life documents include any of the following: autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters, obituaries, life histories, personal experience stories, oral histories and personal histories.⁹³ John

⁹³ Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Biography* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1989), 7.

Creswell lists these as the primary characteristics of the biographical genre of research: the life story of one individual is told, the collected data consists of stories and reconstruction of life experiences, certain "epiphanies" or special events are highlighted, the stories are placed within historical and cultural context, and the author is present in the study but acknowledges that the study is the author's interpretation of a person's life.⁹⁴

There are at least four different ways of viewing biography. First is the *typological* view in which biography is investigated as a literary genre or form. Interpretation involves comparing contemporary biographies to the earliest versions of the genre. Second, the *commonsense* view assumes that biographies are factual accounts of human lives and that writers are bound by certain rules which compel them to be truthful about the life they are investigating. Third, the *sociological* view takes two forms: sociologists writing about their own lives and sociologists writing about the lives of other people. Fourth is the *fictional-historical* view in which autobiography and biography are viewed as fictional accounts of lives within particular historical circumstances. Biographies are fictional not because they are "not true," but because they are constructed out of real or imagined events. Without any scientific way of verifying a subject's recollections and descriptions of experiences, a biography can best be described as fictional or constructed.⁹⁵

Norman Denzin calls this fourth point of view "interpretive biography." The procedural steps in interpretive biography are as follows: First, the author collects an objective set of experiences in the subject's life, either according to chronology or according to

⁹⁴ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1998), 30-31.

⁹⁵ Denzin, 35-41.

life-course events, such as education, marriage, and employment. Second, the author gathers biographical materials through interviews and the collection of other life documents. Third, the author isolates certain important moments, or "epiphanies," in the life of the subject. Fourth, the author searches for the meaning of these events, relying primarily upon the subject's own interpretations. Fifth, the events are placed within the context of the larger structures of the subject's life, including interactions with groups, cultural and historical milieu, and ideologies. Finally, the author is able to provide an interpretation of the life, or cross-interpretations if more than one life is under investigation.⁹⁶

A central feature of interpretive biography is the isolation and interpretation of epiphanies, defined as "interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people's lives."⁹⁷ Denzin describes four types of epiphanies: *major events* are foundational experiences which influence every aspect of a person's life, such as an accident which leaves one paralyzed; a *cumulative or representative event* occurs when one reacts to experiences which have taken place over a long period of time, as when an abused partner decisively leaves a long-term relationship; a *minor epiphany* is any experience--no matter how small--which symbolizes a major event in a person's life, as when the death of a friend's father calls forth the grief of losing one's own father twenty years earlier; and a *re-lived epiphany* is an event whose meaning is derived from the re-living of a prior event, such as religious rituals which recall important experiences in the life of a community of faith.⁹⁸

The interpretive biographical researcher faces certain challenges. This manner of research, for instance, requires that the author collect

⁹⁶ Ibid., 56, 73-75; and Creswell, 50-51.

⁹⁷ Denzin, 70.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 71.

extensive materials by and about the subject. Similarly, the author needs to be clear about the historical and cultural context which supports and, to a large extent, shapes the life of the subject. This also requires that the author develop the ability to discern what stories and issues are essential to the subject's life. Without this ability, the author might miss the deep meanings hidden in the various layers of the life under investigation. Overall, the author cannot assume an absentee role in the larger process; the author must not only acknowledge their presence in the study, but must also present their own perspective and reasons for undertaking the study.⁹⁹

In the following two chapters I use this interpretive biographical methodology to better understand the engaged spiritualities exhibited by Roman Catholic activist Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement in the United States, and Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, active in seeking peace in Vietnam during the war and in resettling refugees afterwards. I chose these two subjects for several reasons: First, they are true exemplars of engaged spirituality, persons whose lives clearly demonstrate the integration of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. Second, they are both prolific writers, providing me with extensive primary information about their life experiences. Third, they are both deep thinking individuals who are able to critically reflect upon their religious commitments and actions. Fourth, they represent two radically different religious traditions. In keeping with my conviction that Christian spiritual formation necessarily takes place in a religiously pluralistic environment, the juxtaposition of Christian and Buddhist expressions of engaged spirituality heightens the contrast between Day and Nhat Hanh and tests the similarities and differences which exist between their respective expressions of engaged spirituality.

⁹⁹ Creswell, 51.

My analysis of these two lives consists of four areas of inquiry. The first is a recounting of the epiphanies or formative experiences which help shape their engaged spiritualities. These experiences will take the form of stories found in their own personal accounts of their lives. The second is a description of the cultural and historical contexts in which these two subjects live and work. So much of the religious education theory just reviewed describes how spirituality is developed in conversation with the surrounding culture. The third area of concentration is the religious context of these two individuals, particularly the beliefs and practices which contribute to the formation and ongoing nurture of an engaged spirituality in each case. This aspect of the study is especially important in light of my overall aim to uncover the role of religious belief and practice in informing an education which nurtures an engaged spirituality. The fourth area is comprised of the personal characteristics exhibited by these two persons. This line of inquiry is suggested by the literature in which the lives of social activists--both religious and secular--are studied in order to uncover those personality traits necessary for the sustained commitment to activism. I am confident that this methodology yields ample clues to what nurtures an engaged spirituality and how Christian congregations might provide for spiritual nurture and encourage acts of compassion and justice.

CHAPTER 3
DOROTHY DAY: A CHRISTIAN EXAMPLE
OF ENGAGED SPIRITUALITY

Dorothy Day remembers the Hunger March of 1932 as having a profound affect on the direction her future life would take. At the time she was a reporter writing about the March for various Catholic newspapers. Even as the United States was in the grip of the Great Depression, 600 unemployed marchers left New York City on their way to Washington, D.C., intending to ask the government to provide jobs, unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, relief for mothers and children, health care and housing for those suffering across the nation. Because the march was sponsored by Communists, the requests of the marchers were not taken very seriously. Both the newspapers and the government viewed this as an example of Communist infiltration. At one stop in Wilmington, Delaware, for instance, the marchers were brutalized with tear gas and the leaders were thrown in jail. Nevertheless, the group pushed on toward Washington. When they reached the capitol, they discovered that police had barricaded the city, making it impossible for the marchers to enter. Undeterred, they set up camp outside the city and stayed there for three days. Finally, the barricades were removed and the jobless marched triumphantly into the city, carrying placards and shouting slogans. Dorothy Day--just thirty-five years of age at the time--stood on the curb watching them go by. Her joy at their success was mixed with sorrow as she remembered that neither she nor her Church--the Roman Catholic Church--were doing much to help these troubled workers. That afternoon she went to church to pray and there

she asked God to provide a way for her to use her talents on behalf of the workers and the poor.¹

Thus marked the beginning of Dorothy Day's ministry on the streets of New York. This important story from her life highlights the way in which prayer and service to the poor were integrally related in her understanding of what it meant to be a Catholic Christian. This chapter focuses on the various factors which shaped Day's religious life, seeking to discover how spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice helped to form her religious affections.

I begin with the historical and cultural context into which she was born and amid which she carried out her vocation. Then, I give an account of her life story, highlighting certain epiphanies or formative experiences contributing to her holistic spirituality. Next, I provide an analysis of Day's engaged spirituality, considering how she deftly combines spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice so that they mutually support and re-inforce each other. Finally, I discuss the formative influences which give rise to and sustain her engaged spirituality throughout her lifetime. This last section provides the basis for the conclusions I draw for religious educators seeking to identify and nurture those factors which can create and sustain an engaged spirituality in their own congregational contexts.

The Context: The United States In the Early Twentieth Century

Day was born on the eve of an incredible century. No one alive in 1897 could imagine the changes that would take place in the world as a result of technology and urbanization. In fact, those are the issues which dominated the American scene when Day was born onto it. The Industrial Revolution had worked its wonders, creating factories and

¹ Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1952), 163-66.

urban sprawl, making millionaires of a few, slave-like workers of many others. Conflicts between labor and management were commonplace and, before the advent of labor unions, the workers rarely won in these battles with their bosses.

The early twentieth century also brought several armed conflicts: the century opened with what would eventually be known as World War I; the Spanish Civil War was fought in the 1930s, a conflict to which many American intellectuals flocked; in the 1940s, the United States entered into World War II, justified by many as a righteous war against Hitler and the Nazis; and the 1950s and sixties brought two anti-Communist wars in Korea and Vietnam. These last two wars were fought in the midst of a "cold" war, in which the superpowers of the world proliferated their caches of nuclear weapons in an effort to deter the start of a "hot" war.

Mel Piehl, one of several interpreters of the Catholic Worker Movement's legacy, points out that, from its beginnings in 1932, the Catholic Worker was a comprehensive movement, never focusing on one topic only. It was concerned with unionization and bread lines in the 1930s, racial integration in the 1940s, participated in the civil rights movement in the south in the 1950s and sixties, and spoke out against American involvement in several wars. Two things which were always consistent were its concern with the problems of the poor and its unmitigated pacifist stance.²

One aspect of Day's activism which becomes immediately apparent is the way in which she takes a pragmatic approach to the causes and cures of the ills of society. As the concerns of the world changed--that is, as the situation which contributed to the difficulties of peoples' lives shifted--so too did her concerns change in order to address the needs of

² Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origins of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 198.

the times. For example, her activism began with a newspaper which championed the cause of the working class, and hospitality houses which fed, clothed and housed those who were destitute because of the Great Depression. As international conflicts escalated in the late 1930s and war became a painful reality, peace and justice issues dominated her concern, even when it was extremely unpopular to express pacifism, such as during the Second World War. Day, however, never addressed poverty or war as isolated topics; she was able to see how these two realities were interconnected and how, in either case, the greatest suffering is always borne by the destitute themselves.

With this brief introduction to the American century into which Day was born, it is now possible to look more closely at her life story. How did she interact with the historical and cultural context of which she was a part? What drew her to social activism? What was the role of her religious affiliation and spiritual inclinations in encouraging her, even compelling her, to carry out her calling to serve the poor and speak out against war?

Dorothy Day's Life: A Story of Christian Engaged Spirituality

In her autobiography *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy Day asks a poignant question: "The problem is, how to love God?"³ This, in fact, has been the main question that has guided much of Day's life. Her struggle to love God has led her to forsake physical comforts, to risk the misunderstanding of family and friends, and to turn toward the care of the suffering, often at great personal sacrifice.

Day's story began in 1897 when she was born in Brooklyn Heights, New York in a home not far from the Brooklyn Bridge. She was the third of five children born to Grace Satterlee and John Day. John was a newspaperman who specialized in horse racing, and whose frequent job

³ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 138.

changes caused the Day family to move often. The first move was to Oakland, California in 1904 when John accepted a job to cover the races at a horse track near there. Grace was a devoted wife and mother who provided stability for the family amid occasional poverty and uncertainty.

One of Day's earliest religious memories occurred at their home in Oakland. One day, while playing in the attic, she came upon a musty Bible. She read it for hours, sensing its holiness, but unsure of the meaning of what she was reading. She also began to go to church, pray and sing hymns with the Methodist family who lived next door. She became, she says, "disgustingly, proudly pious." When she asked her mother why their own family did not do these things, she did not receive a satisfactory answer. Though she was the only one in her family to do so, she continued to go to church.⁴

Tragically, in the wake of the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906, the printing press of the newspaper for which John worked burned to the ground. Out of a job, the family sold what was left of their personal property and moved to Chicago. There they rented a dilapidated six-room tenement flat over a tavern, just two blocks from Lake Michigan. The children were so embarrassed by their accommodations that they would pretend they lived elsewhere by walking into another, more impressive building when they knew others were watching. When John did get a job as sports editor of a local paper, the family was able to move to a large house on Chicago's North Side.

Day had several encounters with religion during her childhood in the city. She particularly remembers a good friend in the tenements, Mary Harrington, who used to tell her about the Christian saints. She also recalls the time she entered the apartments looking for another one of her friends. She ran from room to room hoping to find Kathryn, but

⁴ Ibid., 20.

instead came upon her friend's mother, Mrs. Barrett, who was on her knees saying her prayers. Mrs. Barrett paused just a moment to tell Dorothy that Kathryn had gone to the store, and then resumed her praying. Day calls this her "first impulse toward Catholicism."⁵ Soon after, she began to attend the local Episcopal Church. She was especially touched by the words of the *Te Deum*: "All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and glorify Him forever."

By the age of ten Day had become a voracious reader, devouring the works of Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson and Edgar Allan Poe. Indeed, her love of books remained with her throughout her lifetime. By the time she was a senior in high school, she had begun to read the works of radical socialist writers and activists as well. The book that was most influential for Day during this time was Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, a fictional account of the horrid conditions under which immigrants labored in Chicago's stockyards and slaughterhouses early this century. From then on, rather than sit in Lincoln Park or walk along the beachfront each evening, Day began to take long walks toward the West Side of Chicago, where she could see firsthand the places the poor lived and worked. She was surprised not only by the squalor of the surroundings, but also by the glimpses of beauty--small vegetable gardens ringed by bright marigolds, the smell of lumber and coffee, and the scent of bread and coffee cake. Though others might see the poor as worthless and responsible for their own suffering, Day decided then "that from then on my life was to be linked to theirs, their interests were to be mine: I had received a call, a vocation, a direction in my life."⁶

Day found herself growing more disillusioned with the church. She was angry that the church was doing so little to meet the needs of the

⁵ Ibid., 23-25.

⁶ Ibid., 38-39.

poor, seeming only to be concerned with the rich. These concerns continued when she went away to college at the University of Illinois in Urbana. She immersed herself ever more deeply in the writings and speeches of socialists. Again and again she asked why society worked to alleviate the sufferings of people without ever tackling the underlying causes of those problems.

At eighteen, having completed two years of college, Day moved with her parents to New York City where her father began work at another newspaper. Knowing that she needed a job and a place of her own, she made the rounds of the newspapers, but kept encountering editors who told her that a woman did not belong in the newspaper business. It took five months before she walked into the office of *The Call*, a Socialist daily. The editor, Chester Wright, had nothing against hiring a woman writer, but had no money to pay her. In a moment of inspiration, she told him that she had heard of police officers who had formed "diet squads," groups committed to feeding themselves on five dollars a week as proof that the poor could make it on as little as that. If *The Call* could pay her five dollars a week, she would live on a limited budget and write about it for the newspaper. Wright was so taken with the idea that he agreed to hire Day for five dollars a week for the first month with the promise of raising her salary to twelve dollars a week after that. Rising to meet her own challenge, Day fed herself on twenty-five cents a day and lived in a vermin-infested apartment costing five dollars a month.⁷

Her work as a reporter entailed covering workers' meetings and strikes, listening to speeches, and interviewing great thinkers of the socialist movement. The advent of the Great War precipitated the loss of her job and Day found herself just twenty years old, depressed, and uncertain where to turn next. Wanting to help others in need, she

⁷ Ibid., 50-53.

trained as a nurse at Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn. This work, though difficult, filled her with joy since she was no longer observing and writing about the poor and sick, but caring for them. There she fell in love with an orderly at the hospital, Lionel Moise. She quit her job and moved in with him. When she became pregnant, he took a job out of the country, leaving her money for an abortion. Not wanting to raise a child on her own, she had the abortion.

Soon after she met Berkeley Tobey, a founder of the Literary Guild and one of the wealthier inhabitants of Greenwich Village. She married him on the rebound, but their marriage lasted less than a year. Trying to get her life back in order, she took a job with the City News Bureau and roomed with three women in a Catholic household. For the first time in her life, she witnessed the depth of religious practice and spiritual devotion as exemplified by these women. Through their dedication to weekly Mass, daily prayer and moral purity, she had a model for the Christian life that she wanted to follow.

Having come into a substantial amount of money as a result of one of her writing projects, she bought a fisherman's cottage on the beach at Staten Island in the 1920s. Soon after, she met a man with whom she fell in love. Forster Batterham was an anarchist who did not believe in religion or marriage. Now that Dorothy believed firmly in the existence of God, they would have bitter arguments about faith. He moved into her cottage and they shared an intimate, loving relationship. Though they never married, Day referred to Forster as her husband until the end of her life.

Thus began a time of inner spirituality for Day. She had been given a rosary years earlier, which she now used to say daily prayers while walking to and from the post office in a neighboring town. When she walked along the shore looking for driftwood for the fire, she

recited the words of the *Te Deum* which she learned in the Episcopal Church of her childhood. While doing housework she would turn toward a statue of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and talk with her. Because she knew that none of her socialist friends would understand her private devotion she did not share her experiences with anyone.

When she discovered--to Forster's dismay--that she was pregnant, she was overjoyed. The one thing missing from her life was motherhood. The birth of her daughter, Tamar Teresa, in 1926 cemented Day's connection with the Roman Catholic Church. Her daughter was baptized the following year. Although it was a difficult and painful decision, Day severed her relationship with Forster later that year so that she too could be baptized and become a member of the Catholic Church. Throughout these early days in the Church, however, she felt a strange tension. Although she was drawn to the liturgy and spiritual dimension of the Church, she agreed with many of her socialist friends that the institutional Church seemed to care very little about the poor and oppressed.

The Hunger March of 1932 and her subsequent prayer for guidance proved to be the turning point in Day's lifelong commitment to living the spiritual life through social activism. In her prayer, she asked God to use her in ministry to the poor. Thus, it was truly providential that when she returned to New York City she was greeted by a visitor, a man who introduced himself as Peter Maurin. He explained that mutual friends had told him to seek her out, saying that the two of them thought alike. He had been praying for a collaborator and was convinced that Day was the answer to his prayer. He invited her to participate with him in heralding a revolution, not one built on violence, but on the Christian social teachings of the Catholic Church. He proposed to her that they write a publication that would address the link between

Church teaching and this new world order. "But where do we get the money?" she asked. "God sends you what you need when you need it," Maurin answered. "Just read the lives of the saints." And so, with Day and Maurin writing articles, Day's brother helping with mock-up, and Day and Tamar selling copies on the street, the *Catholic Worker* was born.⁸

The first copy of this radical, Catholic newspaper was handed out in Union Square, New York City on May Day, 1933. They gave a copy of the eight-page tabloid to anyone who would take it without even asking for the cover price, just one penny. By the end of the year, the number of copies printed rose from 2500 to 100,000 as Christian activists found a forum for their concerns.

In addition to their editorial work, the writers of the *Catholic Worker* found themselves inundated with requests for assistance from the poor and needy. After all, the United States was in the midst of the Great Depression, with thirteen million people unemployed. With a steady stream of monetary donations coming in, they were able to rent apartments and even a house for use by writers, visitors and the homeless. By 1936 the *Catholic Worker* had moved into two buildings in Chinatown and thirty-three other *Catholic Worker* hospitality houses had opened across the country. In 1937 the New York house alone was feeding 400 people a day. From the beginning, Day made it clear that all who asked for assistance would be gladly welcomed. None who came for help were preached to, nor were they forced into rehabilitation or job-training programs. She viewed everyone as members of the family, as her brothers and sisters in Christ.

In 1937 she expressed the following sentiments about the men they served and her own sense of Christian responsibility:

Every morning about four hundred men come to Mott street to be fed. . . . My heart bleeds as I pass the lines of men in front of the store which is our headquarters. The place is packed--not another man can get in--so they have to form a line. . . . It is

⁸ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 173.

hard to say, matter-of-factly and cheerfully, "Good morning," as we pass on our way to Mass. It is the hardest to say "Merry Christmas" or "Happy New Year" during the holiday time, to these men with despair and patient misery written on many of their faces.

One felt more like taking their hands and saying, "Forgive us--let us forgive each other! All of us who are more comfortable, who have a place to sleep, three meals a day, work to do--we are responsible for your condition. We are guilty of each other's sins. We must bear each other's burdens. Forgive us and may God forgive us all!"⁹

Under Day's leadership, the *Catholic Worker* took a strong pacifist stand in response to the involvement of the United States in the Spanish Civil War and World War II. Many subscriptions were canceled since the majority of Catholic Christians viewed the *Worker's* stance as unpatriotic and un-American. As many of the former unemployed and homeless went off to Europe to fight a war, one member of the Chicago Catholic Worker community even went so far as to say that the Catholic Worker movement was dead, having outlived its purpose and usefulness.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Day stood firm, continuing to write and edit the monthly journal, often including a simple drawing on the front page: St. Francis standing beside a tame wolf with the caption "Peace without victory."

About this same time, Day was feeling the need to deepen her spiritual life. Through the influence of some Catholic priests who shared her radical social views and commitment to spiritual renewal, the Catholic Worker movement began to sponsor regular retreats. The retreats which came to be so influential in both Day's life and the life of the Catholic Workers were those designed by a French Canadian Jesuit priest, Onesimus Lacouture. The week-long respites from the day-to-day work of the hospitality houses were comprised of meditation and participation in spiritual exercises as well as long stretches of absolute silence. These retreats came to affect every aspect of the

⁹ Dorothy Day, "They Knew Him in the Breaking of Bread," *Catholic Worker*, February 1937, in *Dorothy Day: Selected Writings: By Little and By Little*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992), 80. Used by permission of Orbis Books.

¹⁰ Jim Forest, *Love Is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994), 75.

movement, from interpersonal relationships, to the content of the newspaper, to the atmosphere of the Catholic Worker houses.¹¹

As World War II drew to a close and the Cold War began, the members of the Catholic Worker community continued to take a strong pacifist stance, often leading to protest and arrest. For instance, beginning in 1955, New York City conducted civil defense drills in which citizens were to leave their cars, homes and places of business and retreat to bomb shelters beneath the city. Each year, Day and others gathered at City Hall Park, refusing to participate on the grounds that preparing for war does not lead to peace. They were routinely arrested, fined, and often put in jail. "It is good to be here, Lord," Day wrote while serving a thirty day jail sentence in 1957. "We were, frankly, hoping for jail. Then we would not be running a house of hospitality, we would not be dispensing food and clothing, we would not be ministering to the destitute, but we would be truly one of them."¹² The last drill took place in 1961, when the warning of the air raid sirens was ignored by over 2000 people who stood, laughing, in front of City Hall. Although forty people were arrested that day, it was only a symbolic gesture: New York City never had another civil defense drill.

In the early 1960s Roman Catholics watched in wonder as Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in Rome. Little did anyone know what a profound effect that Council would have on the Roman Catholic Church and its relationship to other denominations and religious groups. At the time, Day was hopeful that the Council would make a statement against war and in support of pacifists and advocates of nonviolence. In fact, during one of her several trips to Rome, she was part of a contingent of twenty Catholic women who met with the bishops and participated in a ten day fast calling the Council to make a

¹¹ Piehl, 86-89.

¹² Forest, *Love Is the Measure*, 97-99.

clear statement: "Put away thy sword." She had fasted many times before, but this one was particularly hard on her sixty-eight year-old body. On the day the fast ended, she felt that her contribution had been so small, barely even noticed by the bishops, but she knew that prayer did have a powerful effect, even if it was hidden and behind the scenes.

Day and her friends were ecstatic to learn that in the final draft of the pastoral constitution, supported by nearly all the bishops, the Council condemned acts of war as crimes against God and humanity, called upon the states to make provisions for conscientious objectors and praised those who seek nonviolent means to bring an end to conflict. The following year Day was invited back to Rome where she was treated like an honored guest and was one of two Americans to receive communion from the hands of Pope Paul VI. When a journalist asked her how this privilege made her feel, she simply said that during the Mass she prayed first for the Pope, who had been ill and was not looking well that particular morning. Then she prayed for the many young people presently in jail because they refused to fight in the "terrible" war in Vietnam.¹³

Back at home, Day actively challenged the government's role in Vietnam. She watched as her friends burned their draft cards and carried out violent acts against government property. She remained true to her conviction that nonviolent means were necessary to accomplish peaceful ends, but she supported those who acted out of the conscience of their convictions. Most Catholic bishops were supportive of the involvement of the United States in Vietnam, But Day took them to task, reminding them that "We are all one, all one body, Chinese, Russians, Vietnamese, and He has *commanded* us to love one another."¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., 111-13.

¹⁴ Ibid., 119.

In this column from the February 1969 edition of the *Catholic Worker*, she explains her belief that the different forms of protest carried out by those who resist the War are actually forms of "penance" for the ways in which all people have a hand in creating, encouraging and ignoring the suffering which takes place throughout the world:

The impulse to stand out against the state and go to jail rather than serve is an instinct for penance, to take on some of the suffering of the world, to share in it. . . .

The thing is to recognize that not all are called, not all have the vocation, to demonstrate in this way, to fast, to endure the pain and long-drawn-out nerve-racking suffering of prison life. We do what we can, and the whole field of all the Works of Mercy is open to us. There is a saying, "Do what you are doing." If you are a student, study, prepare, in order to give to others, and keep alive in yourself the vision of a new social order. All work, whether building, increasing food production, running credit unions, working in factories which produce for human needs, working the smallest of industries, the handicrafts--all these things can come under the heading of the Works of Mercy, which are the opposite of the works of war.¹⁵

In the 1970s, Day participated in strikes and the grape boycott on behalf of United Farm Workers in California. This was the last time she was imprisoned, spending ten days on a prison work farm in 1973. She was seventy-five years old at the time.

In 1975, Day retired from her day-to-day activities with the *Catholic Worker*. She continued, however, to write her column, "On Pilgrimage," for the newspaper. Her last years were quiet, although she did receive a few visitors, read many novels and wrote daily in her diary. She died at home of heart failure in 1980, her daughter Tamar by her side. Through the ongoing witness of the *Catholic Worker* and the movement's hospitality homes, the legacy of Dorothy Day lives on. Perhaps greater still, however, is the inspiration her life story continues to provide today for those who seek to live out their spiritual calling through acts of mercy and love.

¹⁵ Dorothy Day, "Penance," *Catholic Worker*, February 1969, in *Selected Writings*, 179-80. Used by permission of Orbis Books.

Day's Engaged Spirituality: An Analysis

In this section, I provide an analysis of Day's engaged spirituality, looking first at how spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice are mutually supportive and enriching in her life, and then considering the various characteristics which comprise her spirituality. This second task is enriched by the work of scholars who have carefully studied the lives of social activists, often asking questions similar to mine: What factors contribute to a person's decision to become an activist, and how do they sustain their commitment over the long haul? These studies provide insight into the personal qualities of those individuals who engage in acts of social care and social change, thereby offering an interesting complement to the present investigation of two exemplars, Day and Nhat Hanh.

The Mutual Relationship between Spiritual Nurture and Acts of Compassion and Justice

Brigid O'Shea Merriman, writing about the spirituality of Dorothy Day, makes the point that Day's "prayer, work, social and political activity comprised the arena of her spirituality."¹⁶ In other words, Day's spirituality was truly characterized by the dual engagement I described earlier, namely, engagement with those resources which provide spiritual nurture and engagement with the others through acts of compassion and justice. In the pages which follow, I delve deeper into this dual engagement by exploring how spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice are mutually supportive in Day's life. More specifically, how does the spiritual nurture Day received and cultivated in her own life affect her involvement in social action, propelling her to act in ways which are increasingly more focused and mature? Likewise, how does her activity on behalf of the poor convince Day all

¹⁶ Brigid O'Shea Merriman, *Searching for Christ: The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), viii.

the more of her need for God and lead her to commit to a sustained contemplative practice which enables her to act and speak with profound spiritual depth?

One of the interesting facets of studying Day's life is to note how her biographers and commentators rarely give attention to the contemplative dimension of her life. Certainly, writers state that Day was wholeheartedly committed to the Roman Catholic Church and participated in the Church's religious activities, such as Mass, fasting, and prayer, but the primary emphasis is always placed on her social activism. Even the cover of the most recent edition of *The Long Loneliness* boldly proclaims "the autobiography of the legendary Catholic social activist."

A convincing challenge to those who suggest that Day exhibited only a social justice-oriented spirituality is mounted by Merriman, in all likelihood the first scholar to study in-depth the contemplative elements in Day's spirituality. She argues that Day's contemplative spirituality was highly developed from a very early age: she began keeping a personal journal as a child, she was reflective and self-revelatory in her writings, and moved comfortably between solitude and companionship during her years of living at the beach house on Staten Island before the start of the *Catholic Worker*.¹⁷ These early impulses must have provided a firm foundation for Day's embrace of Catholic contemplative spirituality in the years leading up to her baptism in the late 1920s. As we have already seen, Day's spiritual nurture consisted of daily Eucharist, prayer, use of the Rosary and the prayer book, the study of scripture, the discipline of living in community, personal reflection and journal-writing, and participation in retreat. These spiritual practices, which she more fully developed throughout her lifetime, led to the broadening and deepening of her

¹⁷ Ibid., 194.

early impulses toward social action. Here, then, are some of the ways in which spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice found mutual support in the spirituality of Dorothy Day:

First, Day's contemplative practice provided a personal sense of purpose which offered a religious justification for her social action and gave direction to the Catholic Worker movement as a whole. Perhaps the most potent factor contributing to this sense of purpose was her own reading of the Bible and the related desire to follow the example of Jesus contained therein. Friends called Day's love of the Bible and desire to read it often her "Protestant streak," telling her time and again that Catholics should look to the Church--not the Bible--for spiritual support. Day strongly disagreed, finding the Bible to be a source of both comfort and inspiration.¹⁸

Although she had many favorite portions of scripture, she cites Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as the "manifesto" for the pacifist revolution in which she sought to participate.¹⁹ Recorded in the fifth and sixth chapters of the Gospel According to St. Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount is not one sermon, but actually a collection of teachings gathered together in one place. It is made up almost entirely of ethical teachings describing how a person ought to be in relationship with God and other people. In it Jesus teaches about good works ("Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16 NRSV), nonviolence ("If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also." 5:39), charity ("Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you." 5:40), love ("Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." 5:44), humility ("Beware of practicing

¹⁸ Robert Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1987), 125.

¹⁹ Dorothy Day, "Our Country Passes from Undeclared to Declared War; We Continue Our Christian Pacifist Stand," *Catholic Worker*, January and February 1942, in *Selected Writings*, 262.

your piety before others in order to be seen by them." 6:1), prayer ("Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret." 6:6), forgiveness ("If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." 6:14), trust in God ("Do not worry, saying 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'" 6:31), and he holds his followers to a higher standard than is expected of others ("Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees [the religious leaders of Jesus' day], you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." 5:20).

Day's spirituality demonstrates her commitment to the ideals Jesus expressed: she insisted on generosity to the poor, not making distinctions between those who were more or less worthy; she taught that nonviolence was the only sure way to peace; she practiced a deep piety; she understood her activism as a way of seeking forgiveness for her past sins; and she trusted God to provide all that was needed to carry on the ministry to the poor--donations of food, clothes and money, as well as strength for the task at hand. Certainly, there is no denying that Day's initial impulses were toward pacifism and compassion for the poor long before she became a Christian. Nevertheless, these biblical teachings provided the religious justification for her natural inclinations and became the words to which she would return time and again when reassuring herself and others about the importance of the work they were doing.

Second, Day understood the Catholic doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ as having a dual meaning: by partaking in the Eucharist she received into herself the body of Christ and she recognized her participation in the worldwide body of Christ, made up not just of members of the Church, but of all people who are children of the one Father. The doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ was an important

emphasis in the liturgical movement in the Roman Catholic Church. This ancient teaching primarily concerns the relationship between Christ and the Church mediated through the sacraments. While, for some, this doctrine merely reinforced a highly contemplative perspective on the Eucharist, the teaching was significantly broadened during the 1960s to include not only the private, contemplative dimension of spirituality, but to embrace a mandate for the way persons should relate to one another in society. Day found in this larger interpretation of the Mystical Body the justification for her vision of the radical reconstruction of society.²⁰ As a result, the Eucharist became the center of Day's spiritual life and the most important activity of her day. She began every day with Mass at the Catholic Worker house in New York. She believed that in the Eucharist she received Christ and was transformed by him, and then, throughout the day, she received him again in human form, in her encounters with the poor.²¹ The Eucharist was, for Day, a potent symbol of the connection between the material and the spiritual, serving as both a physical and mystical link between the contemplative and active dimensions of her spirituality.

Third, Day's participation in the sacrament of penance created a bridge between her own personal need for confession and her impulse to reach out to those in need. In a sense, Day's interest in penance had two dimensions: a personal atoning for her own sins and a communal acceptance of responsibility for human suffering. Throughout her life, Day struggled with her own shadow side, often remembering those aspects of herself of which she was ashamed and for which she sought forgiveness. Interestingly enough, although she was quite candid about many of her failings, she never talked at all about some very large events in her life, e.g., an abortion, a quick marriage and divorce, a

²⁰ Piehl, 84-86.

²¹ Merriman, 98.

common-law marriage, and giving birth to her daughter out of wedlock. Perhaps, considering the taboos of early twentieth century America, she did not feel she could share these experiences and continue to receive the credibility she needed to carry on her work. Or, perhaps she did not see these personal sins as worthy of mention in comparison to the greater sin she always feared--forgetting the poor. This latter attitude is suggested by a statement made later in her life during an interview with Robert Coles in which she discusses her moral imperative to serve the poor and her tendency toward pride:

There He was, homeless. Would a church take Him in today--feed Him, clothe Him, offer Him a bed? I hope I ask myself that question on the last day of my life. I once prayed and prayed to God that He never, ever let me forget to ask that question. I told a priest about that prayer, and he got annoyed with me. He said I was setting myself up as the moral custodian of the Catholic Church. . . . Oh, he had a point, and it hurt. I think I knew it right away. Jesus practiced what He preached; the rest of us are always being tempted to be longer on preaching than practicing. I think that priest was warning me of a great danger, of becoming sold on the sound of my voice and of becoming my own fan as a reader of my words. . . . You see that I'm caught in a bind here; I want the church to be less sinful, but I know we are all sinners, and I know I'm taking a chance on becoming one of the worst sinners by denouncing so many of the other sinners around.²²

Participation in the sacrament of penance gave Day the opportunity to bring to consciousness these sins and personal failings and to seek God's forgiveness. Even more, as this interview excerpt demonstrates, Day's interest in confession and forgiveness did not end with her own personal transgressions, but included a sense of communal responsibility as well. Not only did she want herself to be less sinful, but she wanted *the Church* to be less sinful. And for Day, the greatest sin was to forget the poor.

I believe there is enough evidence to suggest that Day understood her own service to the poor--as well as the Church's mandate to give to those in need--as a form of penance for sin in response to God's forgiveness. While she does not explicitly make this link when

²² Coles, 69-70. Used by permission of Perseus Books Group.

describing her own sins, she does describe the actions of a group of Vietnam-era draft resisters as an example of penance for the nation's sin of war. She writes: "The impulse to stand out against the state and go to jail rather than serve [in the military] is an instinct for penance, to take on some of the suffering of the world, to share in it."²³ Even as these draft resisters "take on some of the suffering of the world" to atone for some of the sinfulness contained within it, Day herself served the poor and voluntarily lived in poverty as a form of penance for her own past transgressions and ongoing struggles with pride and moralism.

Fourth, Day's spiritual experiences and ongoing interaction with the poor converged, thereby creating a natural entry point for her socialist idealism. As a radical socialist in her early adulthood, Day talked emphatically about social change and truly believed such change was necessary and possible. According to socialist thought, only human beings can be the agents of that radical change. As a maturing Christian, however, she had to affirm that change is ultimately in the hands of God, although faithful persons are called to catch the vision of the Kingdom of God and to work to make that Kingdom visible on earth. She wrote, "Our vision is this. We are working for 'a new heaven and a new earth, wherein justice dwelleth.' We are trying to say with action, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' We are working for a Christian social order."²⁴ Ultimately, this vision is a biblical one, proclaimed by the Church and exemplified in the lives of the saints, but rarely enacted in contemporary life. Commenting on the biblical saying "the poor you have always with you," Day notes that this statement has been repeated by many to justify the poverty in the world and as a means for absolving persons of their responsibility to alleviate suffering.

²³ Day, "Penance," 179.

²⁴ Dorothy Day, "Aims and Purposes," *Catholic Worker*, February 1940, in *Selected Writings*, 91.

The reality of poverty, she insists, does not preclude social action, but only provides greater opportunities to practice the radical Gospel. She concludes: "This class structure is of our making, not His. There will always be His poor, but there need not be so many."²⁵

Time and again Day looked to the Bible and the lives of the saints to support what she knew in her heart to be true, namely, the world we see is not the world that has to be. Drawing upon what she considered to be a strong religious foundation, Day found the impetus for the Catholic Worker movement as well as the courage to challenge those in authority to heed the call to social action. Indeed, at times she was scathing in her critique of American Christianity: rather than empowering people to participate in the world, the Church encourages them to be concerned only with their own salvation. This observation led her to insist that, as both viewpoints found expression in American culture, radical socialism was morally superior to Christianity.²⁶ Even more, observers of American religion note that her strong convictions and consistent action on the issue of pacifism were responsible for moving the Church more solidly toward pacifism.²⁷ Whether she intended it or not, her work had a profound impact on both the transformation of the Roman Catholic Church and American attitudes toward war. I believe that these outcomes were a direct result of Day's dual commitment to both social action on behalf of the poor and disciplined participation in those practices which nurture spirituality: on the one hand, her activism shaped the issues she addressed through prayer, Bible reading, retreat, etc.; and on the other, the spiritual nurture she received and cultivated gave shape and moral efficacy to her urgent activism.

²⁵ Dorothy Day, *Catholic Worker*, May 1943; April 1953; quoted in Piehl, 108-09.

²⁶ Piehl, 17.

²⁷ Ibid., 189. See also Charles Chatfield, "The Catholic Worker in the United States Peace Tradition," in *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement*, ed. Anne Klejment and Nancy L. Roberts (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996), 1.

The Characteristics of Day's Spirituality

Here I list what I consider to be the primary characteristics of Day's spirituality, drawing specifically from her life story and placing those characteristics in conversation with the findings of researchers who have studied the lives of social activists, seeking to uncover what motivates them and sustains them in their work.

Love and compassion for the poor. From the very beginning, Day was motivated by her deep compassion and concern for the welfare of others. There is no doubt that this compassion was truly a natural inclination in Day's sensibilities rather than a religious imperative placed upon her by the Church. Even as a young person she was drawn to fictional stories which told of human suffering and of persons' struggles to overcome injustice. After reading Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, for instance, she began to take long walks into the poverty-stricken sections of Chicago. Then, while working as a reporter for a socialist weekly in New York City, she voluntarily lived on five dollars a week as a show of her solidarity with the poor. That her compassion took on a distinctly religious character following her baptism as a Roman Catholic is exemplified by an experience she had in the 1930s. On her way to a meeting in New York City, she found herself waiting for a traffic light to change. She made use of the time by idly saying the rosary, "when suddenly, like a bright light, like a joyful thought, the words Our Father pierced my heart." She looked around at the people on the street--passersby, longshoremen, seamen, black and white, Protestant and Catholic, Jew and Christian, Communist and non-Communist, perceiving all as children of one Father. "Meditation on this fact makes hatred and strife between brothers the more to be opposed," she wrote. "The work we must do is to strive for peace and concordance rather than hatred and strife."²⁸

²⁸ Dorothy Day, *House of Hospitality* (New York: Sheed and Ward,

Those who study social activists cite a concern for others, or compassion, as a common characteristic among activists. Anne Colby and William Damon claim that paramount for activists is love for others and a sense of gratitude in serving others, especially among those activists who profess religious faith. Amazingly, when faced with persons who were difficult to love, they still found the strength to continue loving them. They theorize that these persons saw the need to serve others as essential for their own spiritual well-being. Some even expressed the belief that the more ungrateful the recipient, the richer the personal reward!²⁹ Enlarging this interpretation, Laurent Daloz and associates define compassion as "constructive, enlarging engagement with the other."³⁰ More than sentimentality, compassion entails truly encountering others in such a way that one's personal sense of self and the world is enlarged.³¹

Clearly, Day's compassion was fueled by the desire to connect with the presence of Christ in the poor and the need to atone for her own failings. Closely entwined with these motivations was her effort to live out the Gospel call by seeking to make God's Kingdom a reality here on earth. She firmly believed that suffering in the world does not have to continue the way it does, and this conviction gave a certain urgency to her work. As a result, her personal world was much larger than just kith and kin, but included all who embraced this vision of a better world--Christians and atheists alike--as well as the disenfranchised poor whom she considered to be sisters and brothers.

Consistency between word and deed. Day consistently and wholeheartedly sought to live the type of life she talked and wrote

1939), 179-80.

²⁹ Anne Colby and William Damon, *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 278-80.

³⁰ Laurent A. Parks Daloz, et al., *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 63.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

about. I am reminded of her willingness to become part of the "diet squad" as a young adult when she made herself one of the poor by spending just twenty-five cents a day on food and living in a squalid apartment. I also remember that, after the start of the Catholic Worker movement, she rejoiced when she landed in jail following a protest, happy because she was suffering the same indignities foisted upon the outcasts of society. Even to the end of her life, she lived in "voluntary poverty," an example of her lifelong effort to be the type of person she asked others to be--sacrificing, generous, compassionate.

The ability to demonstrate such high consistency between one's beliefs and actions is a significant characteristic of social activists. In their study, for instance, Colby and Damon specifically sought out those moral exemplars who acted in accordance with their moral ideals. They recognized, as should we, that there are those persons who have lofty ideals but are never moved to action, as well as those who use corrupt means to accomplish otherwise noble goals. Only persons who show integrity between their beliefs and actions can be considered moral exemplars.³² Similarly, Richard Hoehn discovered in his inquiry that the ability to look at the world from the perspective of one's moral beliefs is often a prerequisite for making moral decisions and carrying out moral actions.³³ Finally, Daloz and associates found that persons seeking the common good often sought to hold together religious conviction and public commitment; such persons are living examples of the maxim that what one professes to believe should have an impact on the way one acts in the world.³⁴

While these researchers suggest that striving to "walk the talk" is sometimes a great challenge for activists, Day's natural movement

³² Colby and Damon, 29-30.

³³ Richard A. Hoehn, *Up from Apathy: A Study of Moral Awareness and Social Involvement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 33-34.

³⁴ Daloz, 143-44.

toward activism always kept her in the public fray. I am certain there were days when she did not want to see one more person or fulfill another need, but she rarely makes mention of these feelings. What we do know is that she could go to her cottage on Staten Island--a luxury she kept despite her commitment to voluntary poverty--to escape the busyness and pressing demands of the Catholic Worker house. Perhaps this is also why she enjoyed the Lacouture retreats so much: for one week several times a year she could legitimately remove herself from the intense work environment of which she was a part and enjoy the blessed silence of communing one-on-one with God. She undoubtedly treasured this time not only because of the spiritual nurture it provided, but also because it allowed her to escape the human suffering she encountered on a daily basis. These encounters gave her enough separation from the work to allow her to reflect on what she was doing, i.e., whether or not her actions were in keeping with the biblical foundations of the movement, and provided time for much-needed rest and rejuvenation.

Nonviolence. A strong emphasis on nonviolence characterized Day's personal conviction, even in the early days before she would have called herself a religious person. She found a distinctive description of the pacifist lifestyle in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, using his teaching as the model the Catholic Worker movement would follow. Even when pacifism was highly unpopular in America during World War II, Day affirmed in the *Catholic Worker* "We are still pacifists."³⁵ At that time, her unwillingness to budge on this one issue created a great schism in the Catholic Worker movement, causing several hospitality houses to dissociate from Day's New York house, and still others to refuse to distribute the paper she edited. Catholic Workers throughout the

³⁵ Day, "Our Country Passes from Undeclared to Declared War," 262.

country pleaded with Day to reconsider her position.³⁶ What would lead Day to risk the demise of the movement for this particular ideology?

Some clues are offered by psychologist Adam Curle whose observation of peace activists led him to develop a typology based on a combination of two factors: "awareness" refers to self-awareness or consciousness of one's own being, while "identity" refers to how one defines oneself.³⁷ Pertinent for this study is his discovery that activists who espouse a nonviolent approach to social conflict exemplify high self-awareness and a strong "awareness-identity," meaning persons' ability to define themselves according to what their self-awareness reveals about their fundamental nature. Curle contrasts awareness-identity with belonging-identity, in which persons define themselves in terms of who or what they belong to.³⁸ High self-awareness and strong awareness-identity combine to form persons who are peaceful and compassionate, in command of themselves without having to seek the approval of others, able to detach from powerful emotions such as anger and bitterness, and inclined to embrace nonviolence when confronting the ills of the world.³⁹

Dorothy Day is most certainly an example of the type of peace activist who combines high self-awareness and strong awareness-identity. Day was deeply conscious of what she believed and what she was willing to live and die for, and this deep understanding shaped who she was and how she lived her life. While it is true that Day was a devoted Roman Catholic and will forever be associated with that great Church, she was her own person as well, confident in her ability to speak for herself and to challenge the beliefs and practices of the Church with regard to issues of peace and Christians' responsibilities to the poor.

³⁶ Forest, *Love Is the Measure*, 74-75.

³⁷ Adam Curle, *Mystics and Militants: A Study of Awareness, Identity and Social Action* (London: Tavistock, 1972), 13, 26.

³⁸ Ibid., 83, 26.

³⁹ Ibid., 83-87.

One question Curle does not answer is why persons exhibiting high self-awareness and strong identity-awareness are inclined toward nonviolence; he simply observes the connection. Perhaps David Adams, another observer of peace activists, provides the answer when he notes that some peace activists develop what he calls a "world-historic consciousness." World-historic consciousness is characterized by the ability to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of political forces and to broaden the political character of a movement so that it coincides with the larger agenda of history. He contrasts this, the highest form of consciousness, with sectarianism, in which a person identifies with only one group or ideology.⁴⁰ This sense of a broadening perspective seems to complement Curle's earlier assertion that awareness-identity, as opposed to belonging-identity, paves the way for nonviolent action. While Adams denies that Day ever attained world-historic consciousness,⁴¹ I beg to differ, since he bases his claim on Day's actions in the 1930s and statements from her autobiography, written in 1952. If he had investigated the mature Dorothy Day of the 1960s and seventies, he would have discovered a woman who believed that nonviolence is not only firmly rooted in her own religious tradition, but is also a universal message, one which applies as much to soldiers fighting in distant lands as it is does to civil rights workers in the southern United States or even individuals living in a neighborhood.

A strong relationship to community. Although Day often enjoyed brief times of solitude, she was always drawn to community life. She participated in several different communities--the group of radical socialists who helped shape her views on society and the need to change its structures; the Roman Catholic Church which provided her a home and

⁴⁰ David Adams, *Psychology for Peace Activists: A New Psychology for the Generation Who Can Abolish War* (New Haven, Conn.: Advocate, 1987), 36.

⁴¹ Ibid., 44-45.

a set of social teachings and devotional practices which were to nurture her throughout her life; and the Catholic Worker community made up of persons who dedicated their lives to serving the poor. Most of her time and effort was spent in direct contact with this third community, although she maintained some friendships with socialists (many abandoned her after her conversion to Catholicism), and her deep love for the institutional Church--its rich history, profound teachings, and meaningful rituals--guided and sustained her through good times and bad.

Researchers into the nature of social activists agree that ongoing membership in a community is a universal characteristic of activists. Bill Berkowitz, for instance, studied local heroes who are defined first and foremost by their interest in building community life. Through personal example they are able to strengthen community virtues, such as, cooperation, trust and belonging.⁴² Colby and Damon also determined that moral exemplars enter into a reciprocal, mutually transforming relationship with their social group. Amazingly, despite their prominent leadership positions, these activists gladly take advice from members of the group. They also tend to look toward formative figures, such as parents, ministers, teachers, and famous inspirational activists, for encouragement and guidance.⁴³ Community, as defined by Daloz and associates, means the sense of being at home in the world. Among activists, community comes to encompass an ever-enlarging circle, from home, to neighborhood, to society, to world. Similar to the other studies, almost every person they interviewed spoke of important persons in their lives, e.g., family members, friends, colleagues or members of the religious community.⁴⁴

⁴² Bill Berkowitz, *Local Heroes* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington, 1987), 181-82.

⁴³ Colby and Damon, 14-15, 168, 177.

⁴⁴ Daloz, 26, 31, 51-52.

These characteristics are congruent with what we have already observed in Day's activism, namely, a commitment to participating in community life, even when such involvement was difficult; an ability to transform the community (most notably the institutional Church) through a consistent witness to the ideals she espoused; a recognition of the relationship which exists between communities, especially those which have different roots but may have similar values and seek similar ends; and a deep appreciation for the example of other activists who have lived a life of integrity and sacrifice, no matter what tradition has produced them. These insights into Day's activism will be given more thorough attention in upcoming sections. This next section, for instance, addresses one of these aspects, namely, the ways in which Day allowed the communities of which she was a part to influence each other.

The ability to assimilate and adapt wisdom from a multitude of sources. It bears repeating that even though Day will always be strongly associated with the Roman Catholic Church, the sources of information which inspired her were incredibly diverse, including socialist thought, fictional stories, and her own personal experience with the poor. Because she loved the world of ideas, she enjoyed reading and discussing fiction and nonfiction, secular and spiritual books. Because she had caught the vision of a world healed of war, poverty and racism, she searched the scriptures and studied the writings of radical thinkers for guidance in making this vision a reality. Her blatant mixing of socialism and Catholic teaching created skepticism among socialists and Catholics alike. In her autobiography she wrote:

The very word "worker" made people distrust us at first. We were not taking the position of the great mass of Catholics, who were quite content with the present in this world. They were quite willing to give to the poor, but they did not feel called upon to work for the things of this life for others which they themselves esteemed so lightly. Our insistence on worker-ownership, on the right of private property, on the need to de-proletarianize the worker, all points which had been emphasized by the Popes in their social encyclicals, made many Catholics think we were Communists

in disguise, wolves in sheep's clothing.⁴⁵

Gary Commins analyzed the religious commitments of four Christian spiritual social activists, including Dorothy Day. He discovered that each one was strongly influenced by the teachings and practices of his/her religious tradition; in addition, they all assimilated wisdom and learned from secular culture and other prominent traditions; finally, they synthesized and adapted the various traditions to assist them in their social activism.⁴⁶ Why some persons are moved to make this synthesis remains unclear, but certainly Day's creation of a movement and the sparking of a "permanent revolution"⁴⁷ were enhanced by her ability to receive and assimilate these different perspectives.

Ambivalence toward the Church. On the one hand, Day was thoroughly devoted to the Roman Catholic Church as an institution and God's representative on earth; on the other hand, she deplored the Church's ostentatiousness and lack of interest in healing the plight of the poor. She writes that, at the time of her baptism, what she knew about the social concerns of the Catholic Church made her angry, explaining "I felt that [the Church] did not set its face against a social order which made so much charity . . . necessary."⁴⁸

Day's socialist impulses and pacifist stance also put her into conflict with the Church hierarchy. In an interview with Robert Coles she reacts angrily when he asks her about the ways she "challenged" church authority:

I didn't ever see myself as posing a challenge to church authority. I was a Catholic then, and I am one now, and I hope and pray I die one. I have not wanted to challenge the church, not on any of its doctrinal positions. I try to be loyal to the church--to its teachings, its ideals. I love the church with all my heart and soul. . . . The Catholic church is authoritarian in a way; it won't budge on what it believes it has been put here to

⁴⁵ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 187-88.

⁴⁶ Gary Commins, *Spiritual People, Radical Lives: Spirituality and Justice in Four Twentieth Century American Lives* (San Francisco: International Scholars, 1996), 5. The four persons are A. J. Muste, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Thomas Merton.

⁴⁷ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 186.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

protect and defend and uphold. But the church has never told its flock that they have no rights of their own, that they ought to have no beliefs or loyalties other than those of the pope or one of his cardinals. No one in the church can tell me what to think about social and political and economic questions without getting a tough speech back: please leave me alone and tend to your own acreage; I'll take care of mine.⁴⁹

Mel Piehl explains that Day made a distinction between the Church's essence and its stand on social, economic, and political issues. Throughout the years, the *Catholic Worker* stressed the enduring authority of the Church and its designated leaders, but Day believed that the *Worker* could boldly speak out on these social, economic, and political matters because it was lay-led and therefore not subject to the same rules as religious, and because it was fundamentally faithful to the essence of Church teaching. At the root for Day was the unity of the body of Christ, giving members the freedom to critique Church policy without destroying its underlying spiritual essence.⁵⁰

This willingness to confront the religious structures of their day and challenge the church to transform rather than conform to secular culture is one of the common characteristics Douglas Strong observed in his study of American Protestant social activists.⁵¹ Other researchers who did not focus only on avowedly religious activists, like Hoehn, found organized religion to be a mixed influence in people's lives. Consistent, however, was Christian activists' frustration with the church's lack of commitment to social action. Nevertheless, he says, "This ultimate concern about people is itself a religious commitment."⁵² Seeing a strong emphasis on religious faith expressed by many social activists, psychologist Curle admitted he was baffled by the correlation. In his opinion, organized religion tends to be a closed system which fosters strong belonging and little awareness of what

⁴⁹ Coles, 82-83. Used by permission of Perseus Books Group.

⁵⁰ Piehl, 90-92.

⁵¹ Douglas Strong, *They Walked in the Spirit: Personal Faith and Social Action in America* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 123-24.

⁵² Hoehn, 161.

exists outside the religious system. Merely speculating on the correlation, he cited two religious practices which he believed could lead persons to embrace activism: meditation, prayer or other exercises which increase awareness of oneself, and service to others outside one's group.⁵³ By now it is clear that Curle's speculation can indeed be corroborated by the engaged spirituality of Dorothy Day: both Day's contemplative practice and her social activism were fueled in large part by her religious affiliation.

Despite Day's protestations to the contrary, I agree with Coles that Day *did* challenge Church authority. She did this not in the sense of questioning the Church's right to speak on matters of faith and morals, but rather by challenging its stand on the important issues of her day. Like the social critics she loved to read, Day entered into friendly (and sometimes not so friendly!) arguments with Church leaders regarding pacifism and the plight of the disenfranchised. In a sense, she was calling the Church to a higher authority--the Sermon on the Mount, the manifesto for the nonviolent revolution the Catholic Workers had undertaken. Of course, such ambivalence was a recurrent theme in Day's life: not only did she have mixed feelings about the Church, but also about the socialist movement to which she had given herself as a young adult. Throughout her life, aspects of both socialism and Roman Catholicism held strong appeal for her, perhaps explaining why she sought to blend the two in a way which was unique and, for her, mutually enriching.

The shadow. Earlier I suggested that Day's activism is in part motivated by her need to atone for past sins and ongoing failings. Therefore, this discussion would not be complete without a word about the so-called shadow side of social activism. Only the study by Daloz and associates talks at length about these personal qualities. These

⁵³ Curle, 85-86.

characteristics include "taboo motivations" such as ambition, anger, the need to please, inordinate pride, fear, guilt, perfectionism, and the need to control. As with all personal qualities, these taboo motivations can have both positive and negative dimensions. For example, anger may motivate one to act destructively, or it may mobilize one to change structures of oppression through nonviolent means.⁵⁴ Unless these characteristics are recognized as real, even normal, it becomes all too easy to dismiss these activists as "saints, neurotic martyrs or duplicitous hypocrites."⁵⁵ What distinguishes these persons from other leaders who wallow in their personal faults is the activists' ability to acknowledge and reflect upon both the good and bad parts of themselves, and then freely forgive themselves and others.⁵⁶ Adams, who sees anger as a positive step in the formation of an activist consciousness, agrees that anger needs to be channeled into action for social change. The most useful anger, however, is that which is directed toward institutions rather than individuals; this more detached form of anger is a powerful tool in the struggle for peace and justice.⁵⁷

While Daloz et al. choose to classify anger as a "taboo motivation," I incline more toward Adams' perspective that anger is a necessary force in the struggle against injustice. This seems to be Day's point of view as well. Day attempted, for the most part, to direct her anger at the larger social forces and institutions at work in society and in the world rather than at specific individuals. The results of these attempts were mixed. Two examples should illustrate this fact: The *Catholic Worker* was her primary platform for informing readers about the injustices of society and for inciting their righteous

⁵⁴ Daloz, 177-80.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 173.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 190-92.

⁵⁷ Adams, 12.

anger in support of social change. In 1937, for instance, she wrote in graphic detail about the Memorial Day attack on striking steel workers and their families in Chicago where ten persons died and 100 others were hospitalized:

We are repeating the protest against the Chicago massacre because the only way to stop such brutality is to arouse a storm of protest against it.

Of whom shall the blame be laid for such a horrible spectacle of violence? Of course, the police and the press in many cases lay the blame on the strikers. . . .

Shall we blame only the police? Or shall we blame just Tom Girdler of the Republic Steel Company? God knows how he can sleep comfortably in his bed at night with the cries of those strikers, of their wives and children in his ears. . . .

Or shall we blame the press, the pulpit, and all those agencies who form public opinion, who have neglected to raise up their voices in protest at injustice and so have permitted it?⁵⁸

Day's words are measured, but the passion which underlies her description of what she witnessed that day is unmistakable. She feels no shame for her anger or for her feelings of disgust at those who would instigate--or even condone by their silence--such an action.

By contrast, Day's anger at the Church's handling of the plight of workers and the poor took on a different character, expressed less as anger toward the institutional Church and more as a direct challenge to Church leaders. Consider, for example, her ongoing disagreements with the Cardinal of New York. On a few occasions she was even called in to his office to be reprimanded for the strong positions she espoused in the *Catholic Worker*. Following one such encounter she wrote a retraction in the paper when, during World War II, she had urged young men not to register for the draft. "I realized," she wrote later, "that one should not tell another what to do in such circumstances."⁵⁹ Overall, however, she stood behind what she included in the *Worker*, claiming that it was always drawn from one or more of the following sources: the papal encyclicals, the Bible, the teachings of Jesus, and

⁵⁸ Dorothy Day, "Memorial Day in Chicago," *Catholic Worker*, July 1937, in *Selected Writings*, 245-46. Used by permission of Orbis Books.

⁵⁹ Forest, *Love Is the Measure*, 76.

the sayings of the saints. In essence, the Cardinal of New York and the writers of the *Catholic Worker* drew from the same sources--albeit reaching different conclusions--and thereby creating an "unbreakable thread" which strangely united the radical Dorothy Day and the conservative Church leaders.⁶⁰

Robert Coles questioned Day about her tense relationship with the Cardinal and found her answers to be pietistic and evasive. He notes that she "knew how to handle the church's earthly representatives,"⁶¹ although she shied away from criticizing the Church itself. She adamantly refused to lead a revolution against the Catholic Church even when she was invited by other radical Catholics to do so. Her viewpoint, Coles points out, was also shaped by the fact that she was a convert to Catholicism, someone who placed loyalty to the Catholic Church ahead of reform of the Church.⁶² These factors made it impossible for her to be openly critical of the Catholic Church in the pages of the *Worker*, even though she was more than willing to question the viewpoints and actions of Cardinal Spellman within those same pages. For example, lamenting the unjust execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg in 1953--an execution supported by Spellman--she wrote that they were led to their death by a Jewish rabbi reading from the Psalms, "those same psalms Cardinal Spellman reads every week as he reads his breviary."⁶³ Fourteen years later, when contemplating Spellman's support of troops in Vietnam, she quotes Jesus as saying "Our worst enemies are those of our own household,"⁶⁴ an obvious reference to her adversarial relationship with the local leaders of the Catholic Church.

⁶⁰ Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 106.

⁶¹ Coles, 85.

⁶² Ibid., 81-88.

⁶³ Dorothy Day, "Our Brothers, the Communists," *Catholic Worker*, July-August 1953, in *Selected Writings*, 276.

⁶⁴ Day, "'In Peace Is My Bitterness Most Bitter,'" *Catholic Worker*, January 1967, in *Selected Writings*, 338.

Day clearly struggled with her own anger, obviously feeling this emotion very deeply, but sometimes unsure of how and when to express it.⁶⁵ When secular institutions were involved, she seemed able to do what Adams suggested, namely, direct that anger toward institutions rather than individuals. She certainly held persons accountable for their actions, but was inclined to see the systemic causes of injustice into which individuals--particularly persons in authority--are easily caught up. By contrast, when the institution in question was the Roman Catholic Church, she was less likely to criticize the institutional Church and instead direct her ire at persons within the Church who did not share her pacifist and pro-labor views. It is almost as if Day is saying, "We're reading the same sources; how can you possibly draw the conclusions you do?!" And while she allows draft resisters and conscientious objectors the freedom to make up their own minds according to their own convictions, she does not give the same courtesy to Church leaders who, following their own consciences, have settled on a different conclusion than Day's. Time and again she implicitly states--sometimes explicitly!--that the Cardinal's position is wrong. Perhaps this observation offers a clue to Day's anger toward Spellman: she probably sensed that his stated position on these issues had less to do with conscience and everything to do with his status, power, and the need to please special interests. I would not doubt that Day's arguments with Spellman tapped into her own need to express power and control, as evidenced by her willingness to use the Bible, Church teaching, and the conscience of her convictions as the platform on which

⁶⁵ Looking at numerous pictures of Day, one is struck by the fact that she is rarely--if ever!--caught smiling. I think it is important to note here that Day's longtime friend, co-worker, and biographer Jim Forest points out that Day did not at all have a "bleak personality" as her photographs might suggest. She was, however, uncomfortable receiving attention from admirers and did not like having her picture taken. He adds that she could tell a bawdy joke with great relish, much to the dismay of those who tended to idolize her. See Forest, *Love Is the Measure*, 151-52.

she stood up to one of the most powerful figures in the Roman Catholic Church and New York City.

Another shadow characteristic of Day is directly related to her arguments with Spellman, namely, an ardent need to control the direction of the movement and a tendency toward moralism. Earlier I mentioned the rift which occurred within the Catholic Worker movement due to Day's strong and immovable stand on pacifism. A similar tension arose when she experienced the Lacouture retreats and decided that all Catholic Workers should participate in them as well. She personally reveled in their rigor, intense periods of study and silence, and emphasis on radical perfectionism and asceticism. Clearly, this was something that was missing in her life and she embraced the retreat with enthusiasm. Unfortunately for Day, not all of the Workers shared her excitement. In fact, her insistence upon incorporating the retreats into the movement created dissension among those who felt that the requirement to participate in these highly structured and rigorous retreats was elitist.⁶⁶ Perhaps it is a testament to Day's strong personality and powers of persuasion that her decisions usually stood and were even largely accepted over time.

Like the activists profiled by Daloz and associates, Day found a way to address the unacceptable, unlovable parts of herself by first of all acknowledging and reflecting upon both the good and bad elements of her personality, and secondly, cultivating the ability to forgive herself and others. Like Coles observed in his interviews with her, Day's attempts at integrating these opposing personality traits are overwhelming pietistic. An example is found in a comment she made in response to critics' accusations that the Catholic Workers were expressing a "holier than thou" attitude when opposing the Second World War: "We must all admit our guilt, our participation in the social order

⁶⁶ Piehl, 86.

which has resulted in this monstrous crime of war."⁶⁷ On the one hand, she acknowledges that, just by virtue of being a citizen of a nation all too eager to participate in war, she must accept responsibility for the suffering World War II causes; on the other hand, her statement is a reflection of her deeper conviction that her pacifist viewpoint was morally superior to those who argued that this was a just war. Nevertheless, Day believed that all persons could be forgiven if they truly repented of their sins, be they pride, moralism or support of war.

Day's ability to forgive, however, did not seem to extend to her encounters with Spellman. Very simply, he showed no signs of embracing the pacifist or radical social views she espoused, thereby making him an easy target for her diatribes. (Interestingly enough, her ire did not extend to Pope Pius XXII who, during the War, espoused neutrality and failed to speak out against the oppression of Christians and Jews, and, after the War, announced that Catholics associating with Communists would be excommunicated.) Her one concession to Spellman was to say that if he asked her to cease publication of the *Worker* she would, although she doubted that the Cardinal, who valued free speech, would ever do so.⁶⁸ She seemed to relish the conflict and perhaps even held out hope that the Cardinal would one day come around to her point of view.

In the end, Day's shadow side and concomitant struggle to forgive the unfavorable characteristics she recognized in herself and others complements the other qualities which comprise her spirituality, namely, compassion for the poor, consistency between her words and deeds, commitment to nonviolence, joyful participation in community life, the ability to absorb wisdom from a variety of sources, and the courage to challenge the Church to live the vision it articulates.

⁶⁷ Day, "Our Country Passes from Undeclared to Declared War," 266.

⁶⁸ Roberts, 105-06.

Formative Influences which Shape and Sustain Day's Spirituality

Having investigated the nature of Day's spirituality, focusing first on the mutual relationship between her spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, and then on the specific characteristics of her own unique expression of spirituality, I now list those formative influences which figure prominently in the development and nurture of Day's engaged spirituality. Some of these influences have been covered in detail above, so just a brief word will be offered here. Other influences will require a more complete explanation.

Contemplative practices. Here I highlight four forms of Catholic contemplative practice, two of which I discussed earlier--the Eucharist and Bible reading--and two others as well--retreat and prayer.

The Eucharist has been called the "master sacrament" of the Christian church. In Catholic understanding, partaking of the bread and wine of the Eucharist both recalls the story of Christ's death and resurrection and assures believers of God's ongoing presence in their lives and in the history of the world.⁶⁹ As we have already seen, the Eucharist provided the foundation for Day's contemplative spirituality. She began attending daily Mass in the 1920s and continued to do so until the end of her life. Furthermore, once the Catholic Worker became a movement and not merely a newspaper, Day instituted early morning Mass and communion as a mainstay of the Workers' daily routine. Aware of the value of the Eucharist in her own life and work, Day once stated "The Mass is the most important thing we do."⁷⁰ She gave a clearer indication of its role in her life in an article she wrote for the March 1966 edition of the *Catholic Worker*:

⁶⁹ Carmody, John Tully, and Denise Lardner Carmody, *Contemporary Catholic Theology*, 2d rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 116.

⁷⁰ Dorothy Day, "The Glory of the Mass," *Catholic Worker*, March 1966; quoted in William Miller, *All Is Grace: The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), 84.

To me the Mass, high or low, is glorious and I feel that though we know we are but dust, at the same time we know too, and most surely through the Mass, that we are little less than the angels, that indeed it is not I but Christ in me worshipping, and in Him I can do all things, though without Him I am nothing. I would not dare write or speak or try to follow the vocation God has given me to work for the poor and for peace if I did not have this constant reassurance of the Mass.⁷¹

A second aspect of Catholic contemplative practice which greatly influenced Day and the Catholic Worker movement was participation in retreat. Her first experiences with day-long and week-long retreats were disappointing. She found them to be suffocating and stifling. She had, however, heard marvelous things about the Lacouture retreat, a one-week, biblically-based retreat incorporating silence, meditation on scripture and classical spiritual exercises. She invited John J. Hugo, a priest who had been trained in the Lacouture method, to begin offering regular retreats at the Maurin farm. Day found these retreats to be liberating, primarily because they provided guidance in the radical inward Christianity she had only read about in the lives of the saints. Like the leaders of the liturgical movement, the Lacouture-trained priests preached the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, calling believers to reject materialism and embrace radical action to end discrimination and war.⁷² Recollecting her first retreat, Day says,

I came away with what I can only consider to be an increased knowledge of the supernatural life, the feeling I had grown in faith, hope and charity, that I had been fed the strong meat of the gospel and was now prepared to run the race, to journey onward with that food which would sustain me for forty days in any wilderness.⁷³

A third contemplative practice Day employed on a daily basis was prayer. "We can do nothing without prayer," she writes. "We must pray as regularly as we eat in order to grow."⁷⁴ In their book *Contemporary Catholic Theology*, John and Denise Carmody discuss three different forms of prayer: liturgical prayer, meditation, and contemplation. Liturgical

⁷¹ Ibid., 83.

⁷² Piehl, 86-89.

⁷³ Merriman, 165.

⁷⁴ Miller, *All Is Grace*, 108.

prayers frame and support the liturgy offered by the community of faith; the prayers which are said or sung by the priest or the congregation during Mass are examples of liturgical prayers. Meditation is an analytical, intellectual form of prayer performed by an individual or a group; the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross, when they are accompanied by conscious reflection upon the deeper meanings of these actions, are meditative. Contemplation is affective prayer which incorporates the five senses; centering prayer, breath prayer, or participation in the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* are all forms of contemplation.⁷⁵

There is ample evidence from her biography that Day participated in all three forms of prayer. She obviously found prayer to be a powerful force for good in the world. "Pray with confidence," she says. "Ask and *you shall receive*. That is a condition laid down by God. God does not lie. Ask for love. Ask for grace. Even at moments of sin. God always answers."⁷⁶ Even more, Day believed that prayer was an integral part of social action. She affirmed this belief to interviewer Coles when he asked her thoughts on attempts by the Roman Catholic hierarchy to coerce her to curb her stance on social, political and economic issues:

I'm sure at least a few monsignori were in on the act. Maybe his eminence, the cardinal [Spellman of New York]. Maybe not. I think they realized that we were going to pray *very hard*, to pray and pray: in churches and in homes and even on the streets of our cities. We were ready to go to Saint Patrick's, fill up the church, stand outside it, in prayerful meditation. We were ready to take advantage of America's freedoms so that we could say what we thought and do what we believed to be the right thing: seek the guidance of the Almighty.⁷⁷

The fourth contemplative practice which was evident in Day's life was devotional reading of the Bible and other religious literature, such as, the lives of the saints, the writings of the Desert Fathers, and

⁷⁵ Carmody and Carmody, 119-20, 135.

⁷⁶ Miller, *All Is Grace*, 108.

⁷⁷ Coles, 84.

works by Christian theologians. To be sure, she approached these works analytically at times, looking for support for the beliefs she espoused. Oftentimes, however, she turned to these writings contemplatively, allowing the deep realities offered there to wash over her like the waves on the Staten Island beach where she would regularly seek solitude throughout her life.

Shortly I will discuss the influence of theological writings, the lives of the saints, and fictional works, so for now let me focus on Day's reading of the Bible. She began a regular practice of daily Bible reading when she became a Catholic. Her favorite passages were Matthew 25:31-46 and the psalms. The Gospel scripture, Jesus' famous parable of the last judgment, reminded her of the days before she became a Catholic, when she showed compassion to "the least of these" unaware that she was serving God.⁷⁸ In the late 1960s she wrote about the enduring value of the psalms:

My strength . . . returns to me with a cup of coffee and the reading of psalms. . . . I need this shot in the arm, in order to recognize that my first duty in life is to worship, to praise God for his creation, in order to get my mind straightened out so that I can see things in perspective.⁷⁹

In every case, whether partaking in the Eucharist, going on retreat, spending time in prayer, or reading the Bible, Day found a way to emphasize the social implications of each of these contemplative practices. At the same time, she did not view these practices as merely ways to move more deeply into activism, but valued Eucharist, retreat, prayer, and devotional reading as enriching in and of themselves. Nevertheless, her insistence that the spiritual life requires a blending of nurture and action enabled her to see the deeper connections between contemplative practice and social action that are often missed by those who have a more narrow understanding of spirituality.

⁷⁸ Merriman, 29-31.

⁷⁹ Miller, *All Is Grace*, 69-70.

Immersion in the lives of the poor. Throughout her life, Day dedicated herself to serving the needs of the poor and to work for an end to the conditions that kept them in poverty. She believed that such a commitment required she live in poverty herself as a way of expressing solidarity with the poor. This is perhaps the clearest way in which Day's actions remained consistent with her convictions. At the same time, I have also noted Day's insistence on keeping a home for herself and Tamar on Staten Island. Although not an ostentatious dwelling by any means, it was her one concession to her middle-class status. It was also most certainly a way for her to cultivate a stability in adulthood that she rarely had when she was a child.

Day drew an important distinction between voluntary poverty and destitution: she and others had *chosen* to live in poverty, to voluntarily forego the pleasures of this materialistic culture to live like the poor. Despite their poverty, however, they always had three meals a day and a warm place to lie down each night. The situation is quite different for the destitute, Day says, for they do not have a permanent place to live, must often go without food, and are treated with disdain by members of respectable society. Day was certain that her own voluntary poverty only approximated the suffering of the truly destitute.⁸⁰ On this matter she wrote:

Going around and seeing [the poor] is not enough. To help the organizers, to give what you have for relief, to pledge yourself to voluntary poverty for life so that you can share with your brothers is not enough. One must live with them, share with them their suffering too. Give up one's privacy, and mental and spiritual comforts as well as physical.⁸¹

So where did Day's inclination toward the poor come from? While she was clearly from a middle class family, Day's formative years were not without serious financial difficulties. Her father, who worked as a sports reporter for various newspapers, was often unemployed. Not only

⁸⁰ Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 80-82.

⁸¹ Day, *Long Loneliness*, 214.

did his family have to make do with little during lean times, but the children had to endure the embarrassment of living in tenement apartments while John Day looked for work. Even more, the frequent geographical moves--from New York to Oakland to Chicago and back to New York--must have created a sense of disconnection and isolation from a larger community of family and friends. These hardships offered Day a means for identifying with the poor from a very early age and may have demonstrated to her that the support and companionship of community is essential for seeing one through these difficult times.

Day's growing religious convictions served to solidify these beliefs: she had heard God's call to serve the poor and believed that the Workers could best do this by living in a community buoyed by religious practices. Another contributing factor was Day's strong confidence in the Mystical Body of Christ, as she wrote in her journal: "It is the mystery of Christ in us. . . . Because Jesus lives in you and me, we are one."⁸² The solidarity she felt with the poor in her youth was surely heightened by the spiritual unity she experienced in later years and which she enacted in all her encounters with the poor. The following incident, related by psychiatrist Robert Coles, makes the point well. Coles first met Day in 1952 at the New York Catholic Worker house. He found her sitting at a table talking with a woman who seemed to be thoroughly drunk. He watched and waited as Day listened to and asked questions of the woman, although Coles noted that most of what the woman said was completely incoherent. Then Coles was utterly stunned by what Day did next. She noticed Coles standing nearby and excused herself from the conversation to greet him. She asked him, "Are you waiting to talk with one of us?" Coles thought, "One of us? . . . With those three words, so quietly and politely spoken, she had indirectly

⁸² Miller, *All Is Grace*, 146.

told me what the Catholic Worker movement is all about and what she herself was like."⁸³

Participation in movements. Throughout her life, Day aligned herself with organizations and movements which espoused an ideology she could embrace. Her first associations were with socialist and pacifist groups. Then, as a young adult, she became a member of the Roman Catholic Church while still nurturing her connections with socialists and pacifists. In the 1930s, when there was no organization which combined her dual concerns for religious faith and social change, she and Peter Maurin started a new group, the Catholic Workers. Her affiliation with these different movements throughout her life demonstrates two important aspects of Day's spirituality: the first is her need to belong to something larger than herself, to be part of a community of persons who share similar outlooks and could work to accomplish similar goals. Secondly, she recognized that a group of persons working together generates energy and enthusiasm making the likelihood those goals will be accomplished much greater than when one person tries to do all the work alone.

The practice of nonviolence. As a Roman Catholic, Day struggled to find a place for the pacifist viewpoint within the Church. In the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, militancy among Catholics was viewed as proof of patriotism, a point of view which could protect believers from the violence of anti-Catholic sentiment.⁸⁴ Despite such wide-spread militancy among Catholics--and indeed, among Americans in general--there were organized groups of persons who believed strongly in pacifism. When Day came on the scene, there were already several Christian, non-Catholic organizations protesting American involvement in World War I, such as the Fellowship of

⁸³ Coles, xvii-xviii.

⁸⁴ Elias, 203.

Reconciliation and the American Friends Service Committee. Day worked closely with the leaders of these other pacifist organizations throughout her professional life.⁸⁵

According to historian Charles Chatfield, Day's insistence upon discussing pacifism not just as an ideology but also as an application of the Sermon on the Mount created a dialogue on pacifism within the Roman Catholic Church. Over several decades, this dialogue resulted in a reassessment of traditional just war theory as the only acceptable position on war and allowed for the acceptance of pacifism, civil disobedience, and conscientious objection as true options for Catholics.⁸⁶ Using the *Catholic Worker* as her forum, Day enjoyed participating in--and often instigating--the conversation on pacifism within the Church and American society. Her unwavering pacifist stance brought her ridicule and accolades, both of which contributed to her spiritual growth: seeking to respond to her detractors, she searched the Bible and the lives of the saints, and participated more fervently in retreat; people's words of praise encouraged her to wrestle with her tendencies toward pride and moralism and moved her to give God the glory for the opportunity to participate in the work and the strength to carry it out.

Living in community. A related issue is the sense of community Day enjoyed by being a part of these various groups. She found much comfort and support in working with people who shared common interests and a common goal. Perhaps this is why she freely formed relationships across religious and social boundaries, bonding with Jews and Protestants, atheists and socialists, all persons who shared her passion for the alleviation of poverty and bringing an end to war. When she chose her home community, however, she lived at the Catholic Worker house in New

⁸⁵ Chatfield, 4.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

York. There she found the best mix of the ideals she held dear: commitment to Catholic contemplative practice and social ministry to the poor. Through reading the lives of the saints, she was drawn to Benedictine spirituality with its emphasis on living in community, seeking to grow in the likeness of Christ, practicing hospitality, and bringing work and prayer into harmony. By 1940, the Catholic Worker house in New York had conformed to the Benedictine cycle of work and prayer: each day began with Mass and communion, then breakfast and meeting the needs of people.⁸⁷ Again, the strong interrelationship between spiritual nurture and engaging in acts of compassion and justice is seen in this model for ministry and in Day's own description of the Catholic Workers:

The day calls for a new technique. We must make use of the spiritual weapons at our disposal, and by hard work, sacrifice, self-discipline, patience, and prayer (as we won't have any of the former without the latter), work from day to day in the tasks that present themselves. We have a program of action and a philosophy of life. The thing is to use them.⁸⁸

Mentors. Day found inspiration in the example of persons--real and imagined--who shared her interest in helping the workers and the poor, bringing an end to war, and living well the Christian life. In these examples she found the courage to manage her own struggles and to carry out the ministry to which she had been called. An avid reader, Day approached devotional and theological reading with the same demeanor--with an inquiring mind and a willing spirit. She read and re-read the Bible, the *Imitation of Christ*, and St. Augustine's *Confessions*. She loved nineteenth century Russian literature, particularly the novels of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky. The fictional characters she met in these and other books were just as real to her as the persons she encountered in her ministry.⁸⁹ She was moved by the teachings of the Desert Fathers and, as a result, incorporated

⁸⁷ Merriman, 97-98.

⁸⁸ Day, *House of Hospitality*, 266.

⁸⁹ Merriman, chap. 2 passim.

aspects of monastic life into the Catholic Worker movement.⁹⁰ She also immersed herself in the lives of the saints of Christianity, finding Francis of Assisi, Juliana of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, and Thérèse of Lisieux to be particularly inspiring as she sought to grow spiritually. She saw these writers not only as companions who could accompany her on her spiritual journey, but also as powerful models whose courage and faith she could emulate.⁹¹

Day was particularly captivated by the lives of the two Teresas, St. Teresa of Avila and St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Their very different lives and her attempts to understand and emulate them both highlight her own struggles to live Jesus' two great commandments--to love God and to love one's neighbor. She was initially drawn to Teresa, the extrovert who taught that love for God is expressed through love of neighbor. Over time, however, she was drawn even more to Thérèse, "the Little Flower," who expressed her love for God through prayer and a direct experience of the presence of God. Although she continued to admire both saints, she came to believe that Thérèse's way was the more difficult and noble way, for it began in contemplation, led to action, and returned to contemplation.⁹²

Within the Catholic Worker movement, Day enjoyed the company of numerous persons who became exemplars for her. She admired many who worked by her side, particularly Stanley Vishnewski, Ammon Hennacy, Mike Gold, and movement co-founder Peter Maurin. Maurin was well-acquainted with Roman Catholic social teaching and was able to make the connection between the work of the movement and the doctrine of the Church. He also introduced Day to the writings of the Christian personalists, such as Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain. In their writings, these

⁹⁰ See *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 172-75.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 193-96. Also see Day's biography of the saint, *Therese* (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1960).

thinkers emphasized that persons are both individuals and members of society with certain rights and responsibilities accorded to each role. They also taught that persons are both spirit and matter, orienting them toward the concerns of this world as well as the joys of the world to come.⁹³ The perspectives of these French personalists clearly coalesced with Day's own thinking and found expression in her articles and books over the years.

Day's ability to look for examples of committed social action rooted in deep religious faith continued throughout her life. In the early 1960s, for instance, she was invited to be the featured speaker at a black church in Virginia. Just one week earlier, civil rights demonstrators had been savagely beaten by police in that community. In her talk that evening, she applauded those like Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King Jr. who tirelessly worked on behalf of the rights of blacks in American society. "It is the Negro who is leading the way," she said, explaining that all who do God's work can learn from the hardships these persons face and the courage they exemplify.⁹⁴ In all of these mentors--whether fictional characters, idealized saints, or real-life companions--Day saw an inclination toward the ideals she held most dear. She searched their lives for clues on the better way to live the Christian life, seeking to learn how to pray, how to draw closer to God, and how to confidently work for peace and justice.

Conclusion

Dorothy Day lived to be eighty-three years old. This exploration of her life, social milieu, religious context, and personal qualities seems so sparse by comparison. I hope, however, that this chapter has communicated the depth, complexity and wisdom of a woman who lived and

⁹³ Ibid., 52-72.

⁹⁴ Dorothy Day, "War Without Weapons," *Catholic Worker*, July-August 1963, in *Selected Writings*, 326-29.

taught by example a truly engaged spirituality. While Day's spirituality was shaped by and nurtured in an American Christian context, the human subject of the next chapter--Thich Nhat Hanh--found his spiritual sensibilities formed in Vietnam, a predominantly Buddhist country torn by a foreign-supported war. I turn now to an investigation of the various sources of his engaged spirituality.

CHAPTER 4
THICH NHAT HANH: A BUDDHIST EXAMPLE
OF ENGAGED SPIRITUALITY

Following the Vietnam War, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh and the members of his religious order attempted to rescue boat people from the Gulf of Siam. Others before him had carried out similar efforts, but these were usually unsuccessful, resulting either in the refugees being sent back to Vietnam or left to die in the treacherous waters in the Gulf of Siam. Therefore, Nhat Hanh and his associates, working from a location in Singapore, planned this rescue in complete secrecy with the intention of taking the refugees to either Guam or Australia. Once safely there, they would call a press conference to bring attention to the plight of the boat people. Throughout this time, Nhat Hanh and his workers lived in a heightened state of mindfulness, sitting in meditation every day, often late into the night, chanting words of hope and courage. They knew that if they were not fully awake and aware, people would die because they themselves had neglected their spiritual practice.

Unfortunately, someone leaked information to the press and their plan was exposed. Singapore police surrounded Nhat Hanh's home at two o'clock in the morning, with officers blocking both back and front doors. He was ordered to leave the country within twenty-four hours. He was deeply concerned for the safety of the 800 refugees who drifted on the sea, with little food and water, and no country to take them in. He says that even though he was standing on dry land, he thought of himself as one of the refugees floating to an uncertain future on a boat with nowhere to dock.

He was reminded of an incident a few years earlier when he had written four Chinese characters on a paper lamp shade. The English translation for those characters is "If you want peace, peace is with you now." In the midst of that particularly tense twenty-four hours, he continuously meditated on those words. He says that he found himself in a state of peace and calm, not at all worried or afraid. Despite the chaos of that time, he will never forget the peacefulness he experienced.¹

The Context: War in Vietnam

The roots of what westerners know as the Vietnam War go back to the late nineteenth century, when Vietnam was a colony of France. Using the hard labor of the Vietnamese people, the French sought to export the nation's vast natural resources, including coal and rare minerals, and various products, such as rice, sugar, glass and textiles, to Europe. Although the profits were tremendous, little money was reinvested in Vietnam itself. The ownership of land passed into the hands of the French or wealthy Vietnamese, leaving the peasants in poverty. Religious differences were evident as well; while the rulers of the country were Roman Catholic, the vast majority of Vietnamese were Buddhist.

From the beginning of colonial rule, nationalist movements were common. The most famous of the nationalist leaders was Ho Chi Minh, founder of the group which was the forerunner of the Vietnamese Communist Party. Although the various nationalist movements represented many different interests--peasants, youth, Buddhists, and Communists--Ho was able to rally the support of the majority of Vietnamese Communists

¹ Catherine Ingram, "Thich Nhat Hanh," in *In the Footsteps of Gandhi: Conversations with Spiritual Social Activists* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1990), 90; Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Sun My Heart: From Mindfulness to Insight Contemplation*, trans. Anh Huong Nguyen, Elin Sand, and Annabel Laity (Berkeley: Parallax, 1988), 123-24.

thereby creating the largest, most effective faction of the entire liberation movement. As Thich Nhat Hanh points out, by 1945 Ho was a national hero. The Vietnamese people, Communist and non-Communist alike, excited about the possibility of national independence, looked to Ho to rid Vietnam of the foreign powers which had dominated the country.²

During World War II, the French leased Vietnam to the Japanese who stationed troops throughout the country and used the airports for their military operations in Southeast Asia. In the chaos which followed Japan's surrender to the Allied forces in 1945, the Viet Minh, the united front of nationalist groups under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, took control of the Hanoi government in northern Vietnam. The French, with the help of the British, took control of southern Vietnam.

War raged for eight years. The Viet Minh, assisted by Communist China, carried out a guerrilla war against the French, who were aided by the United States. By 1954 the French were forced to negotiate with the Viet Minh, and the country of Vietnam was divided into two military zones, North and South. The French--now working closely with the United States government--insisted that this division was only temporary, agreeing to national elections within the year. However, the South Vietnamese leaders, aware that the Communist Ho Chi Minh would easily be elected Vietnam's president, never ratified the Final Declaration which would have allowed the elections to take place.

Roman Catholic Ngo Dinh Diem was chosen to form a new government in the South in the city of Saigon. Amid vast corruption and oppression of the Buddhist majority, Diem's regime was overthrown in 1963. Over the course of the next several years, leadership of the government changed ten times. During that time, Communists intent on ejecting all

² Thich Nhat Hanh, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 52.

foreigners from the country and bringing about the reunification of North and South led insurgencies against the beleaguered southern government. These guerrilla fighters were known as the Viet Cong, or the National Front for the Liberation of the South.

Meanwhile, the United States government, intent on preventing the Communist takeover of South Vietnam, increased its financial support and military assistance to Saigon. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnam, hoping to prevent further infiltration of arms and troops into the South. By 1968, the number of American troops had swelled to 510,000. Nothing, however, seemed to weaken the will of the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese government. Although a limited withdrawal of troops took place in 1969, the war expanded again in 1970 with the United States undertaking bombing raids at unprecedented levels.

Finally, a cease fire agreement in 1973 brought the withdrawal of troops and the recognition of two governments. Fighting between North and South, however, continued until Saigon was seized by Communist forces in 1975. Elections in 1976 led to the reunification of Vietnam, placing power firmly in the hands of the Vietnamese Communist Party in Hanoi.

The aftermath of the war was devastation: vast portions of the both north and south Vietnam were destroyed during the war. Civilian casualties were numerous. Refugees fled by the hundreds of thousands.

Thich Nhat Hanh's Life: A Story of Buddhist Engaged Spirituality

Look at any photograph of Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, and you will see a smile that not only lights up his whole face, but which also invites you to smile back at him. Zen master, author, poet, and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh was born in Vietnam in 1926. He became a monk

at the age of sixteen, at which time he took the name Nhat Hanh which means "one action." Thich is the Vietnamese equivalent of the family name of the Buddha, and is the title taken by all monks and nuns as well.³ Most people, however, affectionately call him Thầy (pronounced "tie"), which means "teacher" in Vietnamese.

Thầy knew that he wanted to become a monk when he was nine years old. Looking at a picture of the Buddha on the cover of a magazine he saw one who was peaceful and happy. He decided he wanted to be this way too. Six months later he and his classmates went on a trip to visit a hermit, a type of monk who spends most of his time in solitude and contemplation. At that time, Nhat Hanh had no idea what a hermit was, but was excited about meeting him anyway. The children walked six miles to the mountain where the hermit lived, then walked another hour up the mountain. They were disappointed to discover, however, that the hermit was not there; they did not realize that hermits generally do not like to greet too many people.

The children stopped for lunch, but Nhat Hanh continued up the hill hoping to find the hermit. As he was walking, he heard the sound of water dripping and came across a beautiful well. When he looked into the well, the water was so clean and clear that he could see all the way to the bottom. "I knelt down and drank the sparkling, clear water, and felt completely fulfilled," he writes. "It was as if I were meeting the hermit face to face!" Exhausted from his journey, he lay down and fell asleep. When he awoke with a start sometime later, he was disoriented and wondered why he was lying down on the hillside. Quickly realizing where he was, he hurried down the mountain to meet up with his

³ In the introduction to *Zen Keys*, Philip Kapleau notes that "Thich" is not comparable to the Western title "Reverend." Instead, Thich is short for "Thich-Ca," the Vietnamese equivalent of Shakyas, short for Shakyamuni, the historical name of the Buddha. See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys*, with an introduction by Philip Kapleau, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 1, n. 1.

classmates. A sentence came to his mind. Curiously, it was not in Vietnamese, but in French: "J'ai goûté l'eau la plus délicieuse du monde." ("I have tasted the most delicious water in the world.") While the other children played, Nhat Hanh ate his lunch in silence, thinking only of the hermit and the well.⁴

Upon joining the monastery at sixteen years of age, he began the rigorous training of a Buddhist monk, but found that much of what he was learning was old-fashioned and needed to be updated for modern times. Although he made this suggestion to his teachers, they failed to take him seriously. Thus, he and some other monks left the monastery to live in an abandoned temple in Saigon. There they studied Western philosophy and science, infusing the ancient teachings of Buddhism with contemporary principles in the hope of making the teachings accessible to more people. Over time they became skilled in the ancient practices of Buddhism--sitting meditation, concentrating on the breath, quieting the mind, and looking deeply to recognize the interconnectedness of all being.

A prolific writer, Nhat Hanh published four books before he was twenty years old. In addition, he edited the magazine of the largest Buddhist organization in Vietnam during the 1940s, and wrote short stories, novels and poetry. In the 1950s, he founded the first Buddhist high school in Vietnam. This was a significant achievement because, at the time, all secondary schools were developed according to a western Christian model, providing no opportunities for young people to learn Buddhism and practice meditation. Continuing his quest to make Buddhism an integral part of people's lives, he then went on to form a monastery

⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Cultivating the Mind of Love: The Practice of Looking Deeply in the Mahayana Buddhist Tradition* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1996), 8-9.

in central Vietnam dedicated to the spiritual renewal of monks, nuns and lay people alike.⁵

In 1961 Nhat Hanh went to the United States to study comparative religions at Princeton University and Columbia University. By 1963, however, the war in Vietnam was raging and he was called back to his homeland by friends who sought his guidance and help in working for peace. Buddhist monks and nuns have a highly developed meditation life and are able to sit quietly for long periods of time, stilling the mind and concentrating on their breathing in awareness of the present moment. But they soon discovered that they could not continue to sit in their temples in quiet repose while those outside the temple were crying and dying. Nhat Hanh coined the term "engaged Buddhism" to describe this commitment to both meditation and helping those in need.⁶

During the war, Nhat Hanh founded the Tiep Hien Order, also known as the Order of Interbeing, a religious order dedicated to engaged Buddhism. *Tiep* means "to be in touch," reminding members that they must be in touch with themselves through regular meditation and looking deeply with understanding and compassion. Nhat Hanh explains that unless one can offer these gifts to oneself, one is unable to extend them to others. *Hien* has two meanings. First, it means "the present time"; the present moment is all that anyone has, so now is the time for peace, joy and compassion. Second, it means "to make real," emphasizing that love and understanding are not just concepts to be discussed, but

⁵ Ingram, 77.

⁶ Nhat Hanh wrote a book in 1963 entitled *Engaged Buddhism*. According to Kenneth Kraft, this is the first time the phrase was used. See Kenneth Kraft, "Prospects of a Socially Engaged Buddhism," in *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism and Nonviolence*, ed. Kenneth Kraft (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 18. Christopher Queen also attributes this phrase to Nhat Hanh, although he adds that the French term *engagé*, meaning "politically outspoken or involved," was in common usage among activist intellectuals in French Indochina long before the arrival of Nhat Hanh's book. See Christopher S. Queen, "Introduction: The Shapes and Sources of Engaged Buddhism," in Queen and King, 34, n. 6.

actions and attitudes which must be made manifest in the world today. Nhat Hanh coined the new English word "interbeing" to express the notion that all beings are interrelated and that those who are awake to this knowledge may live lives of compassion, understanding, joy and peace.⁷

Like most religious orders, the Order of Interbeing is made up of a core group of monks and nuns, as well as an extended community of people all over the world who adhere to the order's fourteen mindfulness teachings. The teachings are summarized in the following two promises: "I vow to develop my compassion in order to love and protect the life of people, animals and plants," and "I vow to develop understanding in order to be able to love and to live in harmony with people, animals and plants."⁸

Thây founded the School of Youth for Social Service in 1964. Monks, nuns and college students went into the war-torn countryside to provide education and health care and rebuild villages destroyed by bombing, sometimes rebuilding the same village as many as eight times! What made Thây's work unique was his unwillingness to side with either faction in the war. He taught that war was the result of misunderstanding and that all people suffer because of it; he and his workers sought reconciliation, not victory. This was quite a dangerous stance for them to take, since both the Communists and anti-Communists looked upon them with suspicion. Some monks and sisters even immolated themselves--burned themselves alive--to call attention to the depth of the suffering of the people. Even then, those who did not understand thought their self-sacrifice was just another political act and failed to hear their cries for peace.⁹

⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Fred Eppsteiner, 3d ed. (Berkeley: Parallax, 1998), 3-6.

⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1987), 85-88.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

In 1966 Nhat Hanh was invited to visit the United States and provide a first-hand account of the suffering of the Vietnamese people. There he met with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Trappist monk Thomas Merton, Senators William Fulbright and Edward Kennedy, and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. He developed a deep friendship with King, who then began to speak out against the war in Vietnam. King nominated Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. From the United States Thây went on to Europe where he met with Pope Paul VI. Because he spoke so frankly while he was abroad, Thây was prohibited from returning to Vietnam where he would have most certainly been imprisoned. He was offered asylum in France, and has lived there ever since.

After the war, Thây sought ways to help those who were continuing to suffer in Vietnam as well as those hoping to escape from the country and make a new home elsewhere in the world. He and other members of the Order of Interbeing set up a network of underground workers who smuggled food into the country. They even tried to rescue boat people from the Gulf of Siam through a program he called *Mau Chay Ruot Mem* ("When blood is shed, we all suffer"). When these attempts failed, he was forced to release the refugees to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees. The refugees languished in Malaysian camps for years. Although saddened by the outcome, Nhat Hanh offers a characteristically Buddhist interpretation of the situation when he says, "the conditions were not right."¹⁰

From there he retreated to Plum Village, a small Buddhist community in southwestern France. He remained there for five years, entering into a period of sustained meditation. Thây was still committed to engaged Buddhism but was perplexed about how best to proceed in his efforts. His concern for human rights abuses in Vietnam led him to continue to encourage the monks and nuns remaining in his

¹⁰ Ingram, 90.

homeland. Government officials viewed him as such a threat that they twice spread rumors that he had died. Even today his writings are smuggled back into Vietnam and are hand copied so that they can be circulated among the people. Though he is a refugee himself, he continues to have a strong influence in his country of origin.

His work and practice are deeply shaped by *pratityasamutpada*, a Buddhist concept which means "dependent co-origination"; at the root of this concept is the awareness of the radical interdependence of all life. He expressed this belief most eloquently during the war when he called for an end to the fighting not because one side was more right than the other, but because war causes all to suffer. He was also able to practice in a spiritual way when he worked for a committee which helped children who were orphaned by the war. The committee provided a photo and other information about each child so that helpers, such as Nhat Hanh, could translate the information from Vietnamese into French, English, Dutch or German. Sponsors were then sought who could provide financial support for the children. The children were placed with family members and the money donated on their behalf paid for food, housing, books and clothes. Nhat Hanh had a marvelous way of "translating" the information provided to him. Instead of reading what had been written about the child, he looked deeply into the face of the child in the photo. After only forty seconds of looking at the child, he became one with the child. Then, with pen in hand, he would write the description. He says, "It was not me who had translated the application; it was the child and me, who had become one. . . . I became him and he became me, and together we did the translation. It was very natural."¹¹

Like most Buddhists, Nhat Hanh meditates on the Three Jewels of Buddhism. These are the Buddha (the teacher), the Dharma (the teaching)

¹¹ Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*, 37.

and the Sangha (the community). A typical meditation is expressed by the words

I take refuge in the Buddha,
the one who shows me the way in this life.
I take refuge in the Dharma,
the way of understanding and love.
I take refuge in the Sangha,
the community that lives in harmony and awareness.¹²

He writes of the time he was on a beach in Sri Lanka and came across six children playing happily in the sand. He was overjoyed to see them because they were so beautiful and happy. He wanted to greet them but did not speak their language. Suddenly, the idea came to him to chant a prayer in the ancient Buddhist language of Pali. He placed his hands together in the traditional way and began to sing, "I take refuge in the Buddha, . . ." Immediately four of the children put their palms together and joined him in the chant. All the while the two other children stood by silently, not wanting to participate but obviously respectful of what was happening. Nhat Hanh invited them to join the chant. They smiled, placed their hands together and began to sing a slightly different song: "I take refuge in Mother Mary, . . ." These Christian children joined their Buddhist friends in prayer. Neither differences of religion nor language could mar this sacred moment. When the chant was over, Nhat Hanh reached out to embrace each child as an expression of the oneness he felt with them.¹³

By the early 1980s Thây returned to the United States and began to lecture and teach westerners the contemplative techniques of engaged Buddhism--sitting contemplation, walking meditation, mindfulness, conscious breathing and smiling. He has sought ways to adapt Buddhism to western culture, such as "telephone meditation," in which the practitioner allows the phone to ring three times before answering it. While it rings, one should smile and breathe mindfully. Let the phone

¹² Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing*, 65.

¹³ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead, 1995), 118-19.

be a reminder to be aware of the present moment. Because Americans often commute to and from work each day, Nhat Hanh also developed "driving meditation" and "subway meditation." He points out that even though many persons perceive these obligations as drudgery, carrying them out mindfully makes it possible to take more pleasure in them.¹⁴

In addition to teaching all over the world, Thây also returns to Plum Village and leads retreats for those wishing to become more adept at Buddhist meditation practice. Many of those who attend the workshops are members of Christian, Jewish and other religious traditions. They learn principles and practices which make it possible for them to deepen their own spiritual disciplines. At the conclusion of an interfaith retreat in California, for example, one man approached Nhat Hanh saying, "Thây, I feel more Jewish than ever. I will tell my rabbi that a Buddhist monk inspired me to go back to him."¹⁵ In addition to his teaching and writing, Thich Nhat Hanh tends to the garden and works on behalf of refugees throughout the world. Through the daily practice of mindfulness and a vow to alleviate suffering, he brings compassion, understanding and peace to our world.

Nhat Hanh's Engaged Spirituality: An Analysis

Earlier I described engaged spirituality as involving a dual engagement--disciplined encounter with those resources which provide spiritual nurture and deep involvement with the world through acts of compassion and justice. Although the language suggests that nurture and action are two separate emphases, in the actual practice of an engaged spirituality, they are expressed in one movement, nurture supporting and giving impetus to action and vice versa. The beliefs, teachings, and activities of Thich Nhat Hanh represent one powerful example of

¹⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, ed. Arnold Kotler (New York: Bantam, 1991), 29-34.

¹⁵ Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 89.

spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice brought together into a holistic expression of the spiritual life. How and why does Nhat Hanh's spirituality come to be expressed in this manner?

The Mutual Relationship between Spiritual Nurture and Acts of Compassion and Justice

During the course of this study, I have expressed my conviction that spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice are distinct, yet complementary, aspects of the spiritual life. Even more, I maintain that they are both necessary dimensions of a holistic spirituality, so much so that, without diligent attention to both nurture and action, a person's spiritual existence is anemic and incomplete. Despite my inclusive perspective, however, I still find it difficult to fully grasp the totality of Nhat Hanh's engaged spirituality, a perspective which sees *no distinction* between inward and outward movements of spirituality, but rather affirms that Buddhist meditation is action and action is meditation. Central to Nhat Hanh's conviction is the concept of "interbeing," a word he created to express the radical interdependence of all things. This belief is rooted in two essential Buddhist teachings--*sunyata*, or "emptiness," and *pratityasamutpada*, meaning "dependent co-origination."

Emptiness is a concept which goes back to the original teaching of the Buddha, but a Mahayana Buddhist philosopher in second century India is credited with expanding its meaning. Nagarjuna taught that emptiness, or *sunyata*, is the nature of ultimate reality. Here an important distinction must be made between "ultimate reality," referring to that which is real in contrast to that which *appears* to be real, and "Ultimate Reality," referring to the Absolute Being who is the source of all existence, such as, God or Allah.¹⁶ For Nagarjuna, *sunyata* is not

¹⁶ Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), 20, n. 4.

just another word for Ultimate Reality, nor is it an expression of nihilism. Rather it affirms that there is no essential distinction between existing things: no essential distinction between the phenomenal world and unconstructed reality, between self and other, between being and nonbeing. Furthermore, there is no essential distinction between the three stages of existence--origination, duration, and cessation--and there is no essential distinction between the three points of time--past, present and future. Nagarjuna explains that, for practical purposes, all things--including "self," "other," "past," "present," "table," and "chair"--must be distinguished from each other. But when one affirms that all of these things are "empty," one recognizes that none of these things ultimately exists in and of itself as an absolute entity.¹⁷

Nagarjuna's teaching on *sunyata* resulted in a deeper understanding of *pratityasamutpada*, the teaching on dependent co-origination. Every thing originates as a result of causes and conditions, and is literally dependent upon all other things. Therefore, no thing is independent or absolute in and of itself, but arises interdependently with all others.¹⁸ In a very profound way, then, *sunyata* refers to the radical relatedness of all things, i.e., all aspects of absolute and phenomenal existence. Frederick Streng uses the image of a circle to represent the radical relatedness of reality: in a circle, neither the center, circumference, nor radius fully represent what is meant by the designation "circle," for all parts are mutually interdependent; in the same way, no one thing is real in and of itself, but exists only in its dependent relationship with other things. Nagarjuna used this understanding of *sunyata* to interpret the roots of suffering in the

¹⁷ Ibid., 44-53.

¹⁸ Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989), 61.

world: release from suffering comes only through the awareness of the deep interrelationships among all beings; the one who suffers, the suffering itself, and any action to alleviate that suffering are all ultimately dependent upon one another.¹⁹

From these notions, Nhat Hanh developed the new verb "inter-be." To illustrate the concept, he encourages persons to look deeply into a sheet of paper. What do we see? We should be able to see the sunshine that made the forest grow, the clouds that brought the rain, the logger who cut the tree, the wheat that fed the logger, etc. Looking even more deeply, we can see ourselves in that sheet of paper too: our minds, ideas, and perceptions. Indeed, if we look long enough, there is nothing we cannot see in that sheet of paper, for all things inter-are.²⁰ Even more, Nhat Hanh maintains that meditation on interbeing and action to alleviate suffering are integral to each other.

He writes:

"In order to fight each other, the chicks born from the same mother hen put colors on their faces." This is a well-known Vietnamese saying. Putting colors on our own face is to make ourselves a stranger to our own brothers and sisters. We can only shoot others when they are strangers. Real efforts for reconciliation arise when we see with the eyes of compassion, and that ability comes when we see clearly the nature of interbeing and interpenetration of all beings. . . . When will the chicks of the same mother hen remove the colors from their faces and recognize each other as brothers and sisters? The only way to end the danger is for each of us to do so, and to say to others, "I am your brother." "I am your sister." "We are all humankind, and our life is one."²¹

At this point, it seems appropriate to raise what is certainly a legitimate criticism of Nhat Hanh's engaged spirituality. Some might be prompted to ask, Where is Nhat Hanh's social action? If meditation and action are so integral to each other, why is he not serving in a soup kitchen or ministering to the dying in addition to cultivating his contemplative practices? Why is he instead traveling around the world

¹⁹ Streng, 166-69.

²⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajñāparamita Heart Sutra* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1988), 3-4.

²¹ Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 118-19.

teaching meditation techniques, lecturing and writing books? The answer to these crucial questions, I believe, is found in Nhat Hanh's understanding of interbeing. We must remember that he sees *no distinction* between meditation and action: every act--whether sitting in meditative repose, eating a tangerine, throwing away a plastic bag, or rescuing refugees--is powerful and meaningful in and of itself *and* is integrally connected to every other act and being in the universe. Hence, he makes no distinction between the work of inspiring persons to embrace engaged Buddhism (which, I would argue, is Nhat Hanh's primary role) and the meditative practices and social activism which are essential expressions of engaged Buddhism.

Nhat Hanh's belief in interbeing results in two major expressions of the mutual relationship between spiritual nurture and engaging in acts of compassion and justice:

First, in Nhat Hanh's spirituality there exists a deep connection between his vow to alleviate suffering and his expression of compassion. The roots of this relationship are found in the life of Gautama, the historical Buddha. Living in India in the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E., Gautama was an heir to great wealth, restless with the sheltered life he led, and seeking answers to the deep questions of life. Confronted with the brute reality of suffering in the world, he vowed to remain silent and still until he understood the reason for its existence. After many days of sitting in meditation under a bodhi tree, he was enlightened to realize what are known as the Four Noble Truths: one, all of life is suffering; two, suffering is caused by craving, desire and attachment; three, there is liberation from suffering; and four, the way of liberation is through the Eightfold Path. From henceforth, Gautama was known as the "Buddha," from *buddh* meaning "to wake up," "to know," "to understand." Firmly believing that all

sentient beings have the ability to be enlightened as he was, he challenged the restrictive Brahmanic caste system (a system which eventually evolved into Hinduism) and paved the way for the creation of a voluntary community of believers not limited by gender or social standing.²²

Like all religions, Buddhism has evolved into a multi-faceted tradition over the past 2500 years. As the teachings have been reinterpreted in different eras and made their way into different cultures from their beginnings in India, new schools have arisen. The first major innovation in Buddhism occurred during the two centuries between 100 B.C.E. and 100 C.E., when the Mahayana school rose to prominence. Mahayana literally means "Great Vehicle," referring to the ideal of the *bodhisattva*, beings on the path to Buddhahood who nevertheless vow to remain in the world of suffering in order to assist other beings toward their own enlightenment. The ideal of the *bodhisattva* existed in contrast to that of the *arhant* of the older form of Buddhism, known as Theravada or Hinayana ("Lesser Vehicle"). The *arhant* is a holy person, most often the product of monastic life, who has attained *nirvana*, or liberation, and is guaranteed release from *samsara*, the cycle of death and rebirth. This saintly existence includes no vow to similarly assist others struggling to break free from *samsara*.²³

Thich Nhat Hanh, though well-educated in both traditions, teaches primarily out of the Mahayana school. Mahayana Buddhism, with its ideal of the *bodhisattva* and emphasis on compassion, provides the basis for a philosophy of and action toward both social and personal transformation. His Buddhist lineage can be found in the Lieu Quan school, an indigenous

²² Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys*, 36-38.

²³ Richard R. Robinson and Willard L. Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*, 3d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1982), 65, 237.

Vietnamese branch of the Lam Te Zen school. Vietnamese Buddhism embraces both of the main types of Buddhism--Theravada and Mahayana--with Theravada most popular in south Vietnam, and Mahayana in the north.²⁴ In an effort to explicate the link between Buddhist social teaching and the contemporary situation in Vietnam, Nhat Hanh wrote a book entitled *Engaged Buddhism* in the 1960s. In that book (which, unfortunately, has not been translated into English) he lifts up the *bodhisattva* ideal as the existential path available to all who wish to undertake it. Hence, the phrase "engaged Buddhism" has come to denote social action which is informed by Buddhist teaching and meditative practice. Nhat Hanh and other contemporary Buddhist leaders have given impetus to the conviction that inner change and social change are inseparable, that one *must* transform the world while simultaneously transforming oneself.²⁵ In fact, socially engaged Buddhism is often called *laukodaya*, Sanskrit for "mundane awakening." Unlike those who seek enlightenment by sitting in quiet repose beneath the bodhi tree, those on the path of *laukodaya* find liberation through seeking both inner *and* outer peace and by immersing themselves in the social, political and economic turmoil of the world. Thus, engaged Buddhism is a viable pathway to liberation which encompasses not just individuals, but families, communities, nations, and the whole natural world.²⁶

For Nhat Hanh, the link between his *bodhisattva* vow to alleviate suffering and his expression of compassion are self-evident: not only do spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice mutually support each other, but they are one and the same. In his commentary on the

²⁴ King, 322.

²⁵ Kraft, "Prospects of a Socially Engaged Buddhism," 12.

²⁶ Queen, 9-10. In a footnote, Queen also points out that while this description accounts for those Buddhists who are committed to social change, there are nevertheless many Buddhists who would not agree with this particular viewpoint. See Queen, 36, n. 23.

fourth mindfulness training of the Order of Interbeing, entitled

"Awareness of Suffering," he states emphatically:

Of course we should practice counting the breath, meditation, and sutra study, but what is the purpose of doing these things? It is to be aware of what is going on in ourselves and in the world. What is going on in the world is also going on within ourselves, and vice versa. Once we see this clearly, we will not refuse to take a position or to act.²⁷

This discussion of the *bodhisattva* vow and its expression in compassion leads to a second manifestation of the mutual relationship between spiritual nurture and cultivating acts of compassion and justice: Nhat Hanh's spirituality focuses on both awareness and non-attachment leading not only to a deepening of meditative practice but also to constructive and creative involvement in the life of the world. At first glance, awareness and non-attachment may seem to be very different from each other but, like the mutual relationship of nurture and action, they are complements to one another. Perhaps looking at Nhat Hanh's understanding of each one will help to make the relationship more clear.

In the first place, the awareness cultivated through meditation enables a person to recognize how they are involved in both the causation and the alleviation of suffering, thereby making it possible for them consciously to be more a part of the solution rather than contributing to the problem. As we have seen, Nhat Hanh maintains that we all carry within ourselves the seeds of love and peace, as well as anger and war. Becoming aware, therefore, of the mixture of violence and nonviolence within ourselves allows us to see that same mixture within others. In other words, we learn to avoid the harmful tendency to divide the world into opposing forces of "us" and "them," "right" and "wrong," "nonviolent" and "violent." If we continue to nurture this awareness through meditation, he says, we will soon develop attitudes of understanding and compassion as well as the ability to act in loving

²⁷ Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing*, 31.

ways. Even more, ongoing cultivation of seeds of nonviolence within ourselves makes it easier for us to water seeds of nonviolence in others.²⁸

In the second place, meditative practice nurtures a healthy non-attachment from both strong personal emotions and the final outcome of a situation, allowing one to remain clear-headed and able to choose those means which will be most effective. Non-attachment is expressed in an essential teaching of the Buddha known as "the raft is not the shore." In his commentary on the teaching, Nhat Hanh explains that a person who must cross a swollen stream may decide that the best way to do so is to build a raft. Once the raft is built and the person has made their way to the other side, however, they do not hoist the raft above their head and carry it to the final destination. Instead, they leave the raft beside the river so that another person can make use of it. This incident is an example of non-attachment to teachings, but it applies equally to attitudes and emotions. By breaking the bonds of attachment, he says, we liberate ourselves from psychological prisons and open the door to understanding and compassion.²⁹

During the Vietnam War, for instance, Nhat Hanh wrote to his colleagues that life and death are but two faces of one reality. Believing this, he says, allows one to face even death with unequalled courage. Even more, deep meditation upon this helps one to see that one's own life is very precious, but so is every other life. Therefore, those who look deeply will come to see that they do not have to seek the destruction or suffering of others in order to insure their own

²⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, "Ahimsa: The Path of Harmlessness," in *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1993), 66.

²⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Thundering Silence: Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Catch a Snake*, trans. Annabel Laity (Berkeley: Parallax, 1993), 30-32.

happiness; relief from suffering and happiness are available to all, not just a few.³⁰

This quick description of awareness and non-attachment begins to bring into focus the strong relationship between the two: awareness leads to understanding and compassion even as non-attachment keeps one from becoming too personally invested in the situation. This combination allows a person to see the roots--what Buddhists call the causes and conditions--which contribute to any given situation. Aware of the root causes, one can address those issues rather than become ensnared in the negative energy often created by emotions such as anger and fear. In a section entitled "Blaming Never Helps," Nhat Hanh uses an example from gardening to illustrate:

When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don't blame the lettuce. You look into the reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun. You never blame the lettuce. Yet if we have problems with our friends or our family, we blame the other person. But if we know how to take care of them, they will grow well, like lettuce. Blaming has no positive effect at all, nor does trying to persuade using reason and arguments. That is my experience. No blame, no reasoning, no argument, just understanding. If you understand, and you show that you understand, you can love, and the situation will change.³¹

Overall, the mutual relationship between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice in Nhat Hanh's spirituality is undergirded by his notion of interbeing: because all things inter-are, meditation is action and action is meditation; there is no distinction between the two. The vow to alleviate suffering, openness to compassion, the growth of awareness, and the cultivation of non-attachment are all deepened through meditation, and they find profound expression in everyday life as well.

³⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation*, trans. Mobi Ho, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 50-51.

³¹ Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 78.

The Characteristics of Nhat Hanh's Spirituality

This holistic understanding of the spiritual life finds expression in the various qualities which comprise Nhat Hanh's spirituality. Some of these characteristics have been discussed in detail above, while others will need greater explanation. Combing through the studies of social activists, I will determine to what extent Nhat Hanh conforms to or diverges from the qualities they delineated.

Mindfulness. Nhat Hanh talks often of being "mindful" of one's thoughts and feelings and of what one does and says. When he was attempting to rescue Vietnamese refugees languishing on the Gulf of Siam, he took "mindful" breaths as a way to keep himself in the present moment and clearly focused on the task at hand. He also instructs students in walking "mindfully" upon the earth. What does it mean to be "mindful"?

Mindfulness, according to Nhat Hanh, is nothing less than the main teaching of Zen Buddhism. It is essentially a practice which cultivates awareness of one's body, feelings, mind, and objects of the mind and which gives rise to insight. The practice involves doing everything mindfully, not just sitting meditation, but carrying water, preparing food, closing a door, doing a kind deed for another, literally everything one says, thinks, and does.³² Nhat Hanh believes that personal and environmental change are integrally related to each other, although the former always precedes the latter. He explains that diligent practice of mindfulness meditation allows the individual to seek equilibrium; through observation of the body, mind, emotions and attitudes, the meditator is able to free herself from fears and anxieties. Only then is environmental change possible. He is quick to point out that meditation is not a means to tranquilize persons so that they can adjust to society, but rather should help them see that society

³² Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys*, 25-29.

is sick and in need of change, and should empower them to seek the changes that are needed.³³

In fact, he maintains that mindfulness, or living in the present moment, actually makes one more inclined to work toward a better future. After all, the seeds of the future are contained within the present: when we care for the present, we care for the future. He says, for example, when we throw a banana peel in the garbage we know that in a few months it will return to us as tomatoes and lettuce, but if we throw a plastic bag into the garbage, it will take much longer for it to recycle. Living in the present moment makes it possible for us to make choices that will help, rather than harm, the future.³⁴

None of the researchers on social activism mention mindfulness as a prominent characteristic of activists. There are at least two reasons for this omission: first, among the persons studied, only a handful were Buddhists and all were North Americans. If these studies were broadened to include persons from other cultures and religions, the list of characteristics would also diversify. Seeing that mindfulness is an essential element of engaged Buddhism, the researchers might be inclined to discover how living in the present moment is an important characteristic of non-Buddhist activists as well. Second, if mindfulness were encountered by these researchers, they might mistakenly interpret it as *only* a meditative technique whose influence on social activism is merely incidental. Clearly, for Nhat Hanh, however, mindfulness is the key to both meditative practice and social activism; it is the one element which keeps a person's spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice firmly grounded in the present moment, thus empowering both personal and societal change.

³³ Thich Nhat Hanh, "The Human Family," in Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action*, 123-24.

³⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Our Appointment with Life: The Buddha's Teaching on Living in the Present*, trans. Annabel Laity (Berkeley: Parallax, 1990), 36-40.

One personal characteristic that does have some affinities with Buddhist mindfulness is Adam Curle's description of awareness. Nhat Hanh does exhibit very high self-awareness, undoubtedly a result of his diligent practice of mindfulness meditation. Furthermore, according to Curle, the combination of high awareness and strong awareness-identity (i.e., the ability to define oneself in ways which are consistent with what awareness reveals about one's true nature) usually motivates a person to embrace a nonviolent approach to solving problems and to express deeply held moral beliefs.³⁵ Nhat Hanh clearly belongs in this category of peace activists in Curle's typology.

Interbeing. I have already talked at length about Nhat Hanh's notion of interbeing and how it finds expression in his engaged spirituality. This section allows me to again name interbeing as an essential aspect of Nhat Hanh's spirituality and to identify how other social activists exhibit this common theme. Those who study social activists have uncovered two characteristics with strong connections to interbeing, namely, a belief in interdependence and the ability to integrate wisdom from a variety of sources.

Laurent Daloz and associates affirm that a strong belief in the interdependence of all things is a prominent characteristic of the activists they studied. These persons do not just express the *hope* of interdependence for the future, but truly *believe* that radical interdependence is a reality to be experienced in the here and now.³⁶ Likewise, Douglas Strong sees "a vision of human interrelatedness," in the lives he explored. This vision enables persons of deep faith who are committed to social action to move beyond serving only the needs of their own community and to seek the common good as well.³⁷

³⁵ Curle, 26, 83-87.

³⁶ Daloz, 201.

³⁷ Strong, 123.

Indeed, Nhat Hanh demonstrates through his teachings and lifestyle that interbeing means all of these things and more: interbeing is radical interdependence, non-duality at its essence. In his commentary on the *Diamond Sutra* he explains the relationship between this notion of non-duality and the impulse to solve the problems of the world:

In Buddhism, non-duality is the essential characteristic of love. In love, the person who loves and the person being loved are not two. Love has an organic characteristic. In light of interbeing, all problems of the world and of humankind should be solved according to the principles of organic love and non-dual understanding. These principles can be applied to solve the problems of the Middle East and the former Soviet Union. The suffering of one side is also the suffering of the other side. The mistakes of one side are also the mistakes of the other side. When one side is angry, the other side suffers, and vice versa. These principles can also be applied to solve environmental problems, such as the greenhouse effect and the depletion of the ozone layer. Rivers, oceans, forests, mountains, earth, and rocks are all our body. To protect the living environment is also to protect ourselves. This is the organic, non-dualistic nature of the Buddhist way of looking at conflicts, the environment, and love.³⁸

Another characteristic of social activists which is an essential aspect of interbeing is the willingness to integrate wisdom from a variety of sources. In my discussion of Dorothy Day, I described Gary Commins' observation that the four persons he studied who lived lives of "spirituality" and "justice" were eminently adept at assimilating insights from other sources of wisdom and integrating them with the resources they had inherited from their own Christian tradition.³⁹ Nhat Hanh carries out a similar process as he considers his own religious tradition and its relationship to contemporary culture. Again, much of this inclination is rooted in the Buddha's teaching "the raft is not the shore." This insistence upon non-attachment to teachings, emotions, and attitudes (even those teachings offered by the Buddha himself!) seems to create a willingness to learn from other teachings and attitudes which might be helpful in living out the *bodhisattva* ideal. Nhat Hanh showed

³⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Diamond that Cuts through Illusion: Commentaries on the Prajñāparamita Diamond Sutra*, trans. Anh Huong Nguyen (Berkeley, Parallax, 1992), 102.

³⁹ Commins, 5.

signs of this inclination early on when, as a teenager, he asked his teachers why they did not incorporate non-Buddhist teachings into the course of study at the monastery. Shortly thereafter, he and other young monks broke away from the established group to form their own community dedicated not only to studying western thought but also to incorporating social activism as an integral part of their meditative practice. Even today, he combines traditional Buddhist practice and the demands of contemporary society in some interesting and exciting ways, through the development of mindful hugging and subway meditation, for example. The inclination to freely draw from these other sources and the recognition of the radical interdependence of all things are both expressions of interbeing, one of the prominent characteristics of Nhat Hanh's engaged spirituality.

Compassion. This next characteristic--compassion--is also deeply rooted in the notion of interbeing. As I mentioned above, an important aspect of Mahayana Buddhism is the *bodhisattva* ideal, a path not limited to monks and nuns only, but to all persons who possess two essential motives: a desire for enlightenment, and compassion for all beings who suffer in *samsara*, the ongoing cycle of birth and death.⁴⁰

Bodhisattvas, the personification of selflessness, aim for full buddhahood, or liberation, for themselves as well as for all sentient beings. They cultivate those spiritual practices which will develop whatever abilities they need to help other beings, whether materially or spiritually. In order to do this effectively, they seek out skillful means, or *upaya*. *Upaya* is sometimes translated as "compassion," and refers to *bodhisattvas'* ability to adapt themselves to the particular needs and concerns of the ones they are assisting without ever attaching themselves to one viewpoint or way of providing assistance as the only

⁴⁰ Robinson and Johnson, 76.

means possible. Whatever merit *bodhisattvas* accumulate for their compassionate actions they gladly turn toward the benefit of others.⁴¹

Nhat Hanh, a Mahayana Buddhist who has taken the *bodhisattva* vow, teaches that compassion is a cornerstone of Buddhist teaching. He explains that it is the first of the five precepts offered by the Buddha: "Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, and plants." This type of deep compassion is cultivated only through mindfulness. Even then, however, compassion is not enough: understanding must also be cultivated so that one will know how to act.⁴² Nhat Hanh explains that the essence of love and compassion is understanding, the ability to put oneself in the place of another, to become one with them, "to suffer with" them. Only when one can do this is compassion born. This spiritual practice is especially important when encountering a person one dislikes or who has been the cause of one's suffering: cultivating compassion in this way has the potential to diminish the suffering of both.⁴³

Nhat Hanh's understanding of compassion is somewhat different from the perspectives on compassion expressed by other activists, such as those studied by Daloz and associates. For those they interviewed, compassion is the result of meaningful, ongoing relationships with others in which a person's sense of self and the world are systematically enlarged.⁴⁴ On a related note, the moral exemplars highlighted in the study by Anne Colby and William Damon consistently focused on the welfare of others rather than on their own personal gain, although the root cause of this attitude might be as diverse as

⁴¹ Williams, 49-53.

⁴² Thich Nhat Hanh, *Touching Peace: Practicing the Art of Mindful Living*, ed. Arnold Kotler (Berkeley: Parallax, 1992), 82.

⁴³ Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 81-83.

⁴⁴ Daloz, 63-68.

gratitude for their own bounty or deep religious conviction.⁴⁵ While Nhat Hanh would not disagree that the growth of compassion requires one to be in relationship with others and to wholeheartedly commit to alleviate the suffering of others, he would insist that compassion is first sparked and nurtured through mindfulness meditation. Compassion born of obligation or duty will always be incomplete, and can even cause more harm than good. Only when a person looks deeply and recognizes the interbeing of all things can they embrace a compassion which is not attached to harmful attitudes and emotions, but which freely blossoms into understanding and love.

Peacefulness. Rather than speak of Nhat Hanh's "pacifism" or "nonviolence," I have chosen the word peacefulness to represent both the inner and outer manifestations of peace he seeks to cultivate: peacefulness in the attitudes, actions, and beliefs of an individual person, and peacefulness throughout the whole world. Peacefulness of this type is, according to Curle, a prominent characteristic of persons such as Nhat Hanh who exhibit high self-awareness and strong awareness-identity.⁴⁶ Consistent with his holistic perspective, Nhat Hanh sees no distinction between these inner and outer manifestations, but freely moves among the personal, interpersonal, communal and international ramifications of "being peace."⁴⁷ Nhat Hanh's peacefulness is clearly shaped by Buddhist teaching and historical circumstances.

Buddhist nonviolence, or *ahimsa*, is rooted in the first precept of the Buddha, namely, to refrain from doing harm. Nonviolence is practiced primarily because it alleviates suffering, thus leading one to attain enlightenment. *Ahimsa* needs to be understood in the context of

⁴⁵ Colby and Damon, 280-83.

⁴⁶ Curle, 83-84.

⁴⁷ *Being Peace* is the title of a book of talks he gave to peace activists and meditation students in the United States in 1985.

pratityasamutpada: because all things rely upon each other in an ongoing web of relationships, deciding to do no harm to just one being has much wider implications than how one's actions affect that one being; nonviolence also has a positive effect upon beings one has not and may never meet. In this sense, nonviolence is beneficial both to others and to oneself.⁴⁸

Nhat Hanh believes that peace in the world requires much more than just advocating pacifism or acting in peaceful ways: true peace is born first within the individual person as a result of practicing mindfulness and looking deeply. Indeed, those who are filled with compassion and are working hard to bring peace to the world may eventually find themselves discouraged and burned out unless they themselves are also filled with peace. "Real strength is not in power, money, or weapons," he writes, "but in deep, inner peace."⁴⁹ This, he says, is the main reason why he and his compatriots refused to side with either the Communists or anti-Communists during the Vietnam War: the Buddhists were striving for both inner and outer peace and, therefore, could not give their support to any organization that did not have this goal as well. In 1985, he reflected on what working for peace entails:

During the war in Vietnam we young Buddhists organized ourselves to help victims of the war rebuild villages that had been destroyed by the bombs. Many of us died during service, not only because of the bombs and the bullets, but because of the people who suspected us of being on the other side. We were able to understand the suffering of both sides, the Communists and the anti-Communists. We tried to be open to both, to understand this side and to understand that side, to be one with them. That is why we did not take a side, even though the whole world took sides.⁵⁰

Accordingly, the anti-war protests he encouraged took many different forms: monks sat calmly before advancing tanks; writers, composers, poets and artists used their crafts to inspire and educate

⁴⁸ Cynthia Eller, "The Impact of Christianity on Buddhist Nonviolence in the West," in *Inner Peace, World Peace*, 92-93.

⁴⁹ Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 99.

⁵⁰ Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*, 69.

the people about the anti-war efforts; people fasted as a form of prayer, believing that fasting could purify one's heart and strengthen one's will while at the same time lead others to embrace compassion; families would take the home altars they had dedicated to their ancestors and place them in the street in an attempt to stop the tanks and soldiers from entering their villages; individuals would shave their heads in the manner of monks and nuns as a symbol of their solidarity with them; persons would give aid and protection to war deserters and draft resisters; university presidents and professors resigned and students refused to attend classes; and many people would not cooperate with oppressive government policies.⁵¹ In all of these incidences, Nhat Hanh consistently demonstrated the deep relationship between inner peace and outer peace, believing that a peaceful world can only be gained through mindfulness meditation and the cultivation of peaceful thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and actions.

The shadow. Daloz and associates list several "taboo motivations," defined as those emotions exhibited by social activists which they themselves feel uncomfortable expressing or which make others suspicious of the real reasons underlying their actions. These shadow emotions include ambition, anger, the need to please, pride, fear, guilt, perfectionism, and the need to control.⁵²

Nhat Hanh freely admits his own struggles with these various attitudes and emotions. In fact, his meditation practice affords him a deep awareness of these things, perhaps a greater awareness than most persons. Feelings, he explains, may be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. The key is to be aware of them, particularly how they manifest as thoughts, bodily sensations, and attitudes. Meditation on these things allows one to "become tolerant, at ease and compassionate with

⁵¹ King, 335-36; and Thich Nhat Hanh, "Love in Action," in *Love in Action*, 40-46.

⁵² Daloz, 177-83.

ourselves and others."⁵³ Because anger is listed as a taboo motivation and because much of mindfulness meditation is centered on cultivating non-attachment to strong emotions and mitigating their harmful effects, let us look closely at an example of Nhat Hanh's anger.

Jim Forest tells of an incident which occurred in 1968 when he and Nhat Hanh were touring the United States with the pacifist organization Fellowship of Reconciliation. War was still raging in Vietnam and Nhat Hanh was using this occasion to call upon the United States to cease its bombing of his native land. Nhat Hanh was giving a talk in a wealthy Christian church in a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri when a man in the audience scornfully challenged the monk: "If you care so much about your people, Mr. Hanh, why are you here? If you care so much for the people who are wounded, why don't you spend your time with them?" Forest remembers that he himself was deeply angered by this personal attack, and was utterly amazed by Nhat Hanh's calm response. Reminding the speaker that the roots of the War are in the United States, he explained that he needed to be in this country in order to address these causes and bring an end to the suffering of his people. In an instant, the tension which had filled the room dissipated and an atmosphere of peace prevailed.

Forest watched as Nhat Hanh whispered to the chairman and left the room. Worried that something was wrong, Forest followed Nhat Hanh outside into the church parking lot and found him violently gasping for air. After several minutes, the monk's breathing stabilized and Forest was able to ask him what had happened. Nhat Hanh said that he became so angry when he heard the man's accusation that he had to breathe very slowly and deeply in order to remain calm. Unfortunately, he continued, his breathing had been too slow and deep. Forest immediately expressed

⁵³ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Breathe! You Are Alive: Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, trans. Annabel Laity, rev. ed. (Berkeley: Parallax, 1996), 54-55.

his belief that even peace activists have the right to be angry and asked Nhat Hanh why he worked so hard to keep from expressing his anger. Nhat Hanh agreed that if he were speaking only for himself he could indeed get angry. He was not, however, just speaking for himself, but for all the Vietnamese peasants who were suffering in his homeland. "I have to show them what we can be at our best," he said.⁵⁴

There are several factors which enter into Nhat Hanh's decision to refrain from expressing anger. One is his belief in interbeing which finds expression in his assertion that the words he speaks and the actions he undertakes while touring the United States affect, in some profound way, the people back home in Vietnam. Related to this is the fact that he was a representative of his people and a guest in a foreign land. While the well-meaning Forest encouraged Nhat Hanh to express the anger he was most certainly feeling, the latter knew that to do so could jeopardize his mission by compromising the pacifist message he was offering. Of course, there is also the very personal issue of what Nhat Hanh thought others might think of *him* if he expressed his anger by shouting at or insulting the man who had attacked him. Perhaps he could not bear the thought of being accused of lack of self-control or, worse yet, hypocrisy.

Another, even more fundamental, factor in Nhat Hanh's thinking is the conviction that anger is often composed of a negative, destructive energy which can and must be transformed into the positive energy of compassion and love. The energy which comprises anger can so easily produce actions which cause great damage, he says. By placing one's energy into mindfully observing the anger, that is, by watching when and how it manifests itself, how it feels in the body, and what other emotions and thoughts accompany it, one can divert energy away from

⁵⁴ Jim Forest, "Nhat Hanh: Seeing with the Eyes of Compassion," in *Miracle of Mindfulness*, 101-04.

harmful actions. In this way, anger is transformed into the compost from which something beautiful can be born. Mindfulness, therefore, becomes the older sister who looks after the younger sibling, anger: she does not seek to drive away the anger, but rather to be a companion to it and guide it in a more positive direction.⁵⁵

Nhat Hanh would certainly not agree with David Adams who asserts that the cultivation of righteous anger is a necessary step in the consciousness development of peace activists.⁵⁶ Instead, he would stress that anger at injustice, while inevitable, does not have to be actively courted. They would agree, however, that anger should not be acted out in destructive ways, even though the means to accomplish this differ for each of them: Adams suggests directing anger toward institutions rather than individuals so that anger can become a powerful resource for social change,⁵⁷ while Nhat Hanh believes that deep awareness of one's own anger can transform this potentially destructive emotion into a positive energy which has personal, interpersonal, and global ramifications.

In his best moments, Nhat Hanh is able to practice the mindfulness which allows him to be aware of his shadow self. Other times, however, he is surprised to find himself swept up in emotions which seem out of his immediate control. He writes, for example, of the pride he felt in his early years of working in Vietnam. At that time, he knew a man named Bac Sieu who, traveling only by bicycle, traversed the countryside, bringing necessary supplies to families throughout the villages. In 1965, when Nhat Hanh first met Bac Sieu, he was a bit shocked at the primitive means this man used to carry out his work and doubted that one person could really make that much of a difference. After all, Nhat Hanh's School of Youth for Social Service had already

⁵⁵ Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 57-58.

⁵⁶ Adams, 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

trained over 300 workers who were helping to modernize villages and rebuild homes ravaged by the war. Nhat Hanh admits to his own pride in this accomplishment. As the war progressed, however, it was not the work of the School of Youth, but that of the simple Bac Sieu, which continued. The Communists closed down the school, as well as its hospitals, orphanages, schools, and resettlement centers. All of the workers associated with the School fled or went into hiding. Meanwhile, Bac Sieu continued his service, riding his bicycle, bringing help and hope to many. Nhat Hanh concludes, "I feel more humble now concerning the ways of practicing generosity."⁵⁸

In another place, Nhat Hanh writes movingly about his deep love for a nun when he was a young monk just beginning his work in Vietnam.⁵⁹ While the two never had any inappropriate physical contact, they did go to great lengths to spend time together, often using their mutual interest in helping the peasants as a justification for such meetings. Although his brothers never challenged the arrangement, a sister in her order wanted her to bring it to an end. Perhaps she threatened to expose them, although Nhat Hanh does not say this. Throughout the relationship, Nhat Hanh took the responsibility to "protect her," presumably to keep her from breaking her vow of celibacy. He also took the initiative of sending her to a newly-formed Buddhist Institute in Hanoi, at the opposite end of the country. It is almost as if he did not trust himself in her presence anymore and so needed for her to be as far away as possible. Furthermore, despite claims that Buddhism holds men and women in an equal status, it is clear that Nhat Hanh saw himself as having a greater responsibility in the relationship with this young nun, probably because he was male and also because he was four years

⁵⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Mindfulness Trainings*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: Parallax, 1998), 23-24.

⁵⁹ See Nhat Hanh, *Cultivating the Mind of Love*, chap. 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 passim.

older than his love interest. I find it fascinating that it has taken thirty years for Nhat Hanh to talk openly of a relationship which undoubtedly brought to the forefront a struggle common to many who take religious vows. Even then, he focuses only on their determination to honor their vows and his attempts to act with compassion, not at all reflecting upon the sexist overtones of his actions and their effect on this young woman. Once again this tale is proof that the shadow side of one's personality is always active, even in one as aware of his attitudes and emotions as Nhat Hanh.

Formative Influences which Shape and Sustain Nhat Hanh's Spirituality

In this section, I will explore five major influences on Nhat Hanh's engaged spirituality: his peace efforts in Vietnam, Buddhist social teaching, his meditative practice, the Sangha (or community of practice), and his world travels. His diligent attention to these essential aspects of Buddhism allows for the development and ongoing cultivation of a life comprised of both spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, not as two separate movements, but as a holistic expression of the spiritual life.

Peace efforts in Vietnam. Earlier I wrote of *ahimsa*, the Buddhist concept of refraining from doing harm. Even though this teaching has been a part of Buddhism since its inception, the need to interpret and apply *ahimsa* became particularly crucial for Buddhists living in Vietnam during the War. In order to offer a more organized resistance to the War, the various lineages of Buddhism in Vietnam united, forming the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBC). Three groups were prominent in that unification, each of which offered a differing interpretation of the teaching to do no harm: First, there were the An Quang pagoda monks who were the most visible and politically active of the factions.

Although, early on, this group refused to align with either the government in Saigon or the Communist forces in the North, they increasingly took stronger stances against the Saigon government and United States interference as the war progressed. The second faction was made up of Thich Nhat Hanh and members of the School of Youth for Social Service. These persons exhibited less anger than the first group, demonstrated a clear commitment to pacifism, and taught that spiritual--to a greater degree than political--solutions were needed to end the conflict. A third faction was made up of Buddhists who supported Ho Chi Minh and the northern Viet Cong forces. These persons, among the three groups, were the most inclined to justify violence in support of Buddhist goals. In addition to these factions there were a sizable number of Buddhist monks and nuns who shunned all involvement with activism or politics.⁶⁰

From this vantage point, we can see that Nhat Hanh represented the distinctly pacifist voice among a full range of viewpoints expressed by Vietnamese Buddhists. Nhat Hanh's involvement with the UBC was a mutually nurturing relationship: Nhat Hanh gave important leadership to the organization, even as his experiences with the different persons who participated in the UBC helped shape his evolving pacifist philosophy.⁶¹ In fact, his belief in "neutralism" became the overriding philosophy of the UBC. In principle, at least, the UBC did not side with either the North or the South, stressing that only a negotiated political, as opposed to a military, solution could bring the War to a conclusion.⁶²

By the mid-1960s, however, the UBC had become increasingly aligned with the nationalist movement, i.e., the movement to eject all foreign governments from Vietnam and to effect a reunification of North and South. In 1966, the UBC carried out its last organized attempt to

⁶⁰ King, 326.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 329-31.

confront the Saigon government. The Buddhists were forcefully repelled, resulting in the imprisonments or deaths of countless Buddhists, lay and religious alike. Nhat Hanh narrowly escaped an assassination attempt at home and, at the conclusion of a world tour to call attention to the suffering of the Vietnamese people, was warned by UBC members not to return to Vietnam. From then on, the Buddhist movement never regained its earlier power to shape the nationalist struggle.⁶³

Although Nhat Hanh maintains that the Buddhists did not take sides during the war, at least one observer believes that this is a misrepresentation on Nhat Hanh's part. Sallie King agrees that Nhat Hanh and his followers, in contrast to some other Vietnamese Buddhists, did not align themselves with the Communists, anti-Communists or Americans. Instead, they supported the Vietnamese people who were suffering horribly as a result of the ongoing conflict. In this sense, they *did* take a stand, choosing to align themselves with the powerless peasants rather than with one of the factions actively involved in the war. For this reason, King believes that a better way to describe Nhat Hanh's efforts to end the War is to call his philosophy "nonseparation from all parties." The goal of this philosophy is not victory for one side or another, but reconciliation and peace.⁶⁴

Nhat Hanh's efforts to bring an end to the war in Vietnam and to mitigate the suffering of the people profoundly affected him personally and gave shape to the engaged Buddhism he taught. In his role as a Zen master, he was called upon to provide assistance to villagers whose homes and families had been destroyed, and to interpret Buddhist teaching for those seeking how to respond to the war. As a poet and writer, he was asked to lend artistic guidance to the peace movement, so he wrote poems which called attention to the evils of war and wrote a

⁶³ Ibid., 333-34.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 344-46.

manual on meditation for activists called *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. What he learned through his various experience--some successes, some failures--helped him to hone his own mindfulness meditation skills so that he could pass along his learnings to others. Even more, being designated as the leader of the engaged Buddhist movement thrust Nhat Hanh into the spotlight so that his every move was scrutinized. In this environment, he has had to be even more conscious of his meditation practice and social action so that others may not be led astray by his carelessness or errors.

Buddhist social teaching. The foundation for Buddhist ethics is found in the fourth of the Buddha's Noble Truths, which states that the path to liberation is eightfold. Accepted by all branches of Buddhism as an authentic teaching of the Buddha, the Eightfold Path is a form of practical wisdom which leads to a self-knowledge that can overcome human suffering, both personal and social. The first of these ethical teachings is right views, an overarching outlook which supports and sustains the path one is seeking to undertake; the second is right thought, bringing one's mental processes under control so that they are detached and peaceful; the third is right speech, the cultivation of truthful, pleasant, meaningful talk; the fourth is right action, avoiding actions which are harmful, seeking instead to act with compassion and love; the fifth is right livelihood, consciously choosing work which does not cause harm to others; the sixth is right effort, conscientiously seeking to mitigate one's inclination toward evil actions; the seventh is right mindfulness, always being aware of one's physical and mental activities; and the eighth is right contemplation, the practice of which will result in a clear mind able to recognize the roots of suffering.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Don P. Premasiri, "The Relevance of the Noble Eightfold Path to Contemporary Society," in *Buddhist Ethics and Modern Society: An International Symposium*, ed. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Sandra A. Wawrytko

Buddhist ethics also distinguishes between human activities, designating each as morally right or morally wrong. For example, certain thoughts, speech and actions contribute to the alleviation of suffering in the world, while others tend to multiply the world's suffering. The latter should be cultivated while the former should be avoided. Likewise, certain occupations, such as serving in the military, dealing in arms and selling intoxicants, multiply suffering in the world, while other occupations do not. Again, the Buddhist practitioner is admonished to choose their occupation mindfully. Contemplation upon the Eightfold Path, then, can lead one to a place where their thoughts, speech and actions are rooted in love, compassion, truth and justice, thereby creating the conditions whereby social change can take place.⁶⁶

Lending support to the Eightfold Path is *sila*, the Sanskrit word translated as "ethical conduct." The five basic precepts of *sila* are expressed in negative terms: to refrain from killing, lying, stealing, engaging in sexual immorality, and taking intoxicants. The way the precepts are written makes them sound very much like the commandments found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. They are not, however, intended to be rules one is obliged to follow; instead, persons adhere to them voluntarily in the recognition that they are universal moral guidelines which, when followed, contribute to harmonious relationships psychologically, socially, contemplatively and cosmically. The connection between the personal and social dimensions is clear: a person who demonstrates inner harmony helps to create the conditions for social harmony. Likewise, social harmony offers a positive context for the cultivation of the contemplative spirit.⁶⁷

(New York: Greenwood, 1991), 134-40.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 140.

⁶⁷ Lily de Silva, "The Scope and Contemporary Significance of the Five Precepts," in *Buddhist Ethics and Modern Society*, 143 and 146.

Although he is a dedicated Dharma teacher, Nhat Hanh agrees with the Buddha that students should refrain from absolutizing any teaching, including those which come from the Buddha himself. In his commentary on "The Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Catch a Snake," Nhat Hanh explains that the Buddha compared his own teachings to poisonous snakes which can cause great harm if they are handled incorrectly. By knowing the correct way to catch a snake, one can pick it up safely; likewise, if one views the Buddha's teachings as skillful means (*upaya*) rather than absolute truth, then one's practice is deepened and one's ability to help others is enhanced.⁶⁸

Are there no absolutes in Nhat Hanh's understanding of Buddhist social teaching? I agree with Sallie King who sees at least one absolute in his teaching, namely, the alleviation of suffering, the main principle upon which all Buddhist teaching is based.⁶⁹ Certainly, all who take the *bodhisattva* vow make the alleviation of suffering their primary aim. A second absolute I see in Nhat Hanh's social ethic is pacifism. In fact, Nhat Hanh goes beyond the Buddha's message--"refrain from taking life"--to enunciate what is clearly a pacifist ethic. His commitment to pacifism is evident in his re-writing of the precepts. These mindfulness trainings⁷⁰ provide the ethical framework for the Order of Interbeing, the Buddhist order he founded during the war. Although the teaching of the Buddha states that one should refrain from doing harm, thereby leaving the ultimate interpretation to the discretion of the individual interpreter, Nhat Hanh's refinement of the Buddha's teaching strongly affirms a pacifist stance:

Aware that much suffering is caused by war and conflict, we are determined to cultivate nonviolence, understanding and compassion

⁶⁸ Nhat Hanh, *Thundering Silence*, 28-29.

⁶⁹ King, 343.

⁷⁰ In the third edition of *Interbeing*, Nhat Hanh introduces the term "mindfulness trainings" to replace the traditional word "precepts." Because these are not meant to be rules and prohibitions, but rather guidelines and practices, designating them as *mindfulness trainings* is more consistent with their intent. See Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing*, 7.

in our daily lives, to promote peace education, mindful meditation, and reconciliation within families, communities, nations, and in the world. *We are determined not to kill and not to let others kill.* [emphasis mine] We will diligently practice deep looking with our Sangha [the Buddhist community of practice] to discover better ways to protect life and prevent war.⁷¹

One activity which obviously contradicts this pacifist teaching is the occurrence of self-immolation during the Vietnam War. Oftentimes Nhat Hanh has been called upon to explain why Buddhists would choose to burn themselves alive. He explains that on those few occasions when individuals asked his permission to carry out self-immolation, he always said "no." And yet, after the fact, he has described these acts as personal sacrifices on behalf of peace:

Nobody can persuade another to give his or her life in that way. Still I think we must try to understand those who have sacrificed themselves. We do not intend to say that self-immolation is good, or that it is bad. It is neither good nor bad. When you say something is good, you say that you *should* do that. But nobody can urge another to do such a thing. So such a discussion is not pursued in order to decide whether self-immolation is a good tactic in the nonviolent struggle or not. It is apart from all that. It is done to wake us up.⁷²

Meditative practice. Although these self-immolations are perplexing given the vow "we are determined not to kill and not let others kill," they begin to make more sense in light of Buddhist contemplative practice, usually referred to as "mindfulness meditation." A clue to this is found in Nhat Hanh's statement, "It is done to wake us up." Buddhism offers two ways to achieve enlightenment: gradually and gently, or quickly and directly. The first way is the one taught by most Buddhist schools, while the second is the way of Zen.⁷³ The immediacy and drama of a self-immolation allows an opening for sudden enlightenment, if a person is able to perceive it as such. By linking self-immolation to enlightenment, as Nhat Hanh does here, he also

⁷¹ Ibid., 21.

⁷² Daniel Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Raft Is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward a Buddhist/Christian Awareness* (Boston: Beacon, 1975), 61-62.

⁷³ Christmas Humphreys, *An Invitation to the Buddhist Way of Life for Western Readers* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 177.

completely shatters the misconception that the pursuit of enlightenment is only a solitary journey which finds its deepest expression in quiet repose. Self-immolation offers a prime example of the Buddhist notion of *upaya*, or skillful means: a *bodhisattva* may choose those actions which are necessary to bring about the liberation of all sentient beings, even those actions which, in a limited view of reality, may seem to be extreme. Even more, because of *pratityasamutpada*, the interconnectedness of all being, any action carried out with mindfulness can potentially lead to the enlightenment of oneself and others.

Interestingly enough, these struggles to understand the relationship between meditation and the realities of the contemporary situation do indeed take Buddhist meditative practice to a new level of engagement with the world. Undoubtedly Fred Eppsteiner is correct when he writes in his article about Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing that the Order's meditative techniques were "developed in the crucible of war and devastation that was the daily experience of many Southeast Asians."⁷⁴ Unable to idly sit by as suffering mounted around them, monks and nuns broadened their meditative practice to include not only caring for the innocent victims of war, but organizing anti-war demonstrations, printing leaflets and books, administering social service projects, and actively assisting draft resisters.⁷⁵ These religious perceived no separation between their sitting and their acting.

Nhat Hanh addresses this holistic understanding of meditation in his commentary on the Diamond Sutra:

We must look at ourselves and ask, "Is this vow [to lead all beings to enlightenment] at all related to my life and the life of my community? Are we practicing for ourselves or for others? Do we only want to uproot our own afflictions, or is our

⁷⁴ Fred Eppsteiner, "In the Crucible: The Precepts of the Order of Interbeing," in *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Fred Eppsteiner, rev. 2d ed. (Berkeley: Parallax, 1988), 152.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 152.

determination to study and practice to bring happiness to other living beings?" . . . If we study and practice with a heart like this, we won't have to wait several years for others to notice. They will see it right away by the way we treat the cat, the caterpillar, or the snail.⁷⁶

From this perspective, then, there is no distinction between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, according to Nhat Hanh, for mindfulness meditation and actions to alleviate suffering flow out of the same vow to lead all beings to enlightenment.

In his book on Buddhism, Walpola Rahula describes four different types of meditation drawn directly from the teachings of the Buddha.⁷⁷ Although the forms of meditation are each somewhat different, one quality is found in all of them, namely, mindfulness, or deep awareness of whatever is going on in the mind, body and emotions. The first, and most popular, type of meditation is concentration on the breath. Here one is mindful only of the movement of the breath, taking care to notice thoughts and feelings which arise, but not allowing them to interfere with one's concentration. This is the only form of meditation for which a body position is stipulated--sitting cross-legged in the so-called "lotus" position, or in a chair, with spine erect. For all other forms of meditation, one may find it advantageous to sit, stand, walk or even lie down.

A second type of meditation entails being mindful of whatever one does throughout the day, whether eating, drinking, talking, or dressing. This form of meditation is sometimes referred to as "living in the present moment." When getting dressed, for instance, one should think deeply about how the cotton shirt feels against the skin, how the sun and rain enabled the cotton plant to grow, those who labored to grow and pick the cotton, those who wove the cloth, and how, at the end of its useful life, the shirt will decompose and the cycle will begin anew.

⁷⁶ Nhat Hanh, *Diamond that Cuts through Illusion*, 35.

⁷⁷ The following discussion is taken from Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove, 1959), 69-74.

Third, one may meditate upon certain emotions, such as anger, depression and annoyance, and the physical sensations which accompany them, such as tension and nausea. This practice requires that one learn to recognize when these feelings arise, uncover what causes them to arise, watch how they move and change in one's consciousness, and how they eventually pass away. The goal of this practice is not to control one's emotions, but to learn to watch them objectively so that one may become detached and free.

Finally, the fourth type, called "insight meditation," involves thinking deeply on ethical, spiritual and intellectual topics. Study, reading, discussion and deliberate reflection are the tools of this form of meditation.

Nhat Hanh, as a result of his years of monastic study, is quite adept in his practice of all these meditation methods. His diligent practice shaped his own depth of mindfulness and he, in turn, has given shape to new forms of meditation relevant to contemporary situations: not only was he instrumental in describing and encouraging meditation appropriate to the crises Buddhists were facing in Vietnam in the 1960s, but he has also sought to modernize traditional meditation practice to make it accessible to twentieth century persons. For example, he has written numerous *gathas*, or short verses, which can cultivate mindfulness in the midst of everyday situations. Upon entering a car, he says, meditate upon these words: "Before starting the car, / I know where I am going. / The car and I are one. / If the car goes fast, I go fast." This meditation is meant to remind us of all the times we get into our cars to escape our daily responsibilities, how the pollution our cars emit choke the breath of the entire planet, and how, as drivers, we have the potential for causing great destruction.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*, 66-67.

Another traditional practice Nhat Hanh has successfully introduced to western practitioners is walking meditation, or walking mindfully upon the earth. The practice of walking with an alert mind and gentle smile can be carried out individually or, even better, in groups. The following excerpt from Nhat Hanh's guide to walking meditation suggests that the personal and social effects of walking meditation can be transformational. Even though these images about "healing Mother Earth" are phrased poetically, his words are not meant to be symbolic only:

Walking mindfully on the Earth can restore our peace and harmony, and it can restore the Earth's peace and harmony as well. We are children of the Earth. We rely on her for our happiness, and she relies on us also. Whether the Earth is beautiful, fresh, and green, or arid and parched depends on our way of walking. When we practice walking meditation beautifully, we massage the Earth with our feet and plant seeds of joy and happiness with each step. Our Mother will heal us, and we will heal her.⁷⁹

Nhat Hanh has also modernized the approach to teaching meditative techniques into a style Kenneth Kraft calls "spirituality democratic." Students are given the necessary instruction and then they are counseled to practice as best they can on their own. Although advanced practitioners are always available to help, students are never required to commit themselves to one master teacher, nor are they asked to relinquish other religious affiliations. Kraft describes this approach as family-oriented, when "family" is understood quite broadly. The practical result is that Nhat Hanh has been able to achieve a unique synthesis of traditional spiritual practice and the needs of contemporary society.⁸⁰

Sangha/community. Nhat Hanh is certain that it is nearly impossible for one to practice these things without the support of a Sangha, a community of practice.⁸¹ The word Sangha, as Nhat Hanh uses

⁷⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Long Road Turns To Joy: A Guide to Walking Meditation* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1996), 15. Used by permission of Parallax Press.

⁸⁰ Kraft, "Prospects of a Socially Engaged Buddhism," 19.

⁸¹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Teachings on Love*, ed. Arnold Kotler, trans. Mobi Warren and Annabel Laity (Berkeley: Parallax, 1997), 131.

it, does not refer to just one type of community, but encompasses many different forms. For instance, the first Sanghas among Buddhists were voluntary associations of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen who came together to study the sutras and engage in meditation.⁸² Accordingly, Nhat Hanh is actively involved in his own Sangha, the Order of Interbeing, which he founded in 1966. Although it began with only six members--three men and three women--it has grown to a membership of 400 core members and thousands worldwide who are part of the extended community. (Core members take vows to uphold the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and commit to spending sixty days in mindfulness each year. Community members profess their support of the Mindfulness Trainings and seek to put them into practice in their everyday lives. Membership in the Order is open to monks, nuns, and laypersons.)⁸³ Forming a Sangha does not have to be as complicated as this, however. The best way to build a Sangha is to find one other person who wants to participate in walking or sitting meditation, precept recitation, tea meditation or discussion. Invite others to join too, and then there will soon be a large community of practice. If there are no people with whom one can commune, then it is also permissible to let the trees, birds and mindfulness bell form one's Sangha.⁸⁴

Nhat Hanh explains that the Sangha is the soil and the individual person is the seed: without proper nourishment, the seed will die. Therefore, members are encouraged to "take refuge in the Sangha," meaning to put their trust in a community of persons who practice mindfulness together.⁸⁵ How does Nhat Hanh "take refuge in the Sangha"? First and foremost, he is a product of monastic education and discipline. He has participated in the rigors of monastic life for over

⁸² Robinson and Johnson, 30.

⁸³ Fred Eppsteiner, introduction to *Interbeing*, by Nhat Hanh, viii.

⁸⁴ Nhat Hanh, *Teachings on Love*, 139.

⁸⁵ Nhat Hanh, *Cultivating the Mind of Love*, 71-72.

sixty years. His community of practice has taken several different forms throughout the years: the traditional Buddhist monastic setting of his childhood, the small group of monks who embraced both meditative practice and social work in his youth and young adulthood, and the Sangha in exile which makes its home in Plum Village, France and is comprised of religious and lay members living all over the world. Even more, Nhat Hanh creates Sanghas wherever he goes, bringing together small and large groups of people for teaching, discussion, meditation, and action. In his retreats he often speaks of the deep connection between one's commitment to engaged Buddhism and one's relationship to a community. The Sangha, he says, provides the support which allows one to go more deeply into meditative practice and to engage in social work. Without this essential support, one would most surely burn out.⁸⁶

World travels. Today, Nhat Hanh's concerns are strongly shaped by the world context of his work. No longer able to return to Vietnam, he traverses the globe, leading retreats, teaching the Dharma, and encouraging others to embrace engaged Buddhism. This global view allows him to see the struggles of persons in diverse cultures and contexts, enabling him to highlight the suffering which exists in all countries, not just his native Vietnam. It also makes it possible for him to call attention to the interdependence of nations and individuals, reminding us all, for example, that overconsumption of food in one part of the world contributes to hunger in other parts, or that the roots of a war waging in one nation can be found in another nation many miles away. Even more, these experiences have encouraged him to update traditional Buddhist teachings and practices for the benefit of contemporary, western persons. Had he remained in Vietnam, for example, he might never have known the need for "subway meditation" or offered healing retreats for American veterans of the Vietnam War. In sum, Nhat Hanh's

⁸⁶ Nhat Hanh, *Teachings on Love*, 138.

travels have broadened his worldview and allowed him to bring Buddhist social teaching and meditation practice, uniquely formed by the experience of war's devastation, to a new, diverse constituency.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have analyzed the life of Thich Nhat Hanh, concentrating on the contextual, religious and personal factors which contribute to the development and nurture of his engaged spirituality. I have shown how his commitments, teachings and actions exemplify a spirituality which is holistic and integrated, deftly combining spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice in such a way that the interrelationship is seamless and thorough. One more task remains before I can describe my recommendations for Christian religious educators seeking to nurture an engaged spirituality in their own congregational settings, namely, to compare and contrast the engaged spiritualities of Day and Nhat Hanh in order to determine what lessons might be learned from their lives. This is the task to which I now turn.

CHAPTER 5
IN SEARCH OF AN ENGAGED SPIRITUALITY TRADITION: COMPARING
DAY'S AND NHAT HANH'S UNIQUE EXPRESSIONS

While this study has highlighted the engaged spiritualities of Dorothy Day and Thich Nhat Hanh, I readily admit that there are other persons who also exemplify this holistic approach to the spiritual life. Some are well-known, while others are amazingly ordinary in the circumstances of their daily lives. All, however, share a common passion for integrating nurture and action. Therefore, I would suggest that there is an engaged spirituality tradition which is not limited to one religious tradition only, but which incorporates persons from all times and places who have sought the union of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. Because Day and Nhat Hanh are a part of that tradition, this investigation of their lives helps to paint a portrait of what engaged spirituality looks like and provides clues for how others might tap into that tradition as well. Thus, this chapter builds a bridge between these life stories and my theory of Christian religious education which nurtures an engaged spirituality. This bridge has three parts: first, a recounting of the lessons on spirituality offered by Day and Nhat Hanh, a reflection on the similarities and differences in the ways Day and Nhat Hanh sought to unite spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice in their own lives, and a comparison of the formative influences which shaped and sustained each of their engaged spiritualities.

Lessons on Spirituality from Dorothy Day

Imagine that I have invited Dorothy Day to sit with us now and share her "Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life." Here are the words of wisdom that I believe she would wish to share with us:

➤ Look at all events in life through the eyes of faith. Be alert to the opportunities for service in your particular time and place in history.

➤ Live with others in community, receiving both the joys and struggles it offers. If you are able, align yourself with a historic faith community. Even if it does not exemplify all the ideals you hold dear, you will find sustenance and hope in its tradition, teachings, and rituals.

➤ Look to others who have diligently lived the spiritual life and learn from their example.

➤ Following the example of Jesus, who never turned away from the poor, gladly immerse yourself in their world, seeking to become one with them. Beware of the temptation to offer some charity then move on, thinking that your duty is done.

➤ Accept your responsibility, not only for alleviating the suffering of others, but for allowing it to flourish in the world at all.

➤ Christians are called to make manifest God's Kingdom on earth--a Kingdom of peace, justice, and mercy. Confidently step out in faith. When God gives the vision, He always provides the resources.

➤ Let your anger toward injustice inspire you to do works of mercy, not acts of violence or hatred. Peaceful ends can only be achieved through nonviolent means.

➤ Stay true to your convictions even when they conflict with the popular or established viewpoints. Enter into a partnership with

persons whose convictions are in keeping with your own, even if those persons belong to religious, social, or racial groups which are different from yours.

➤All persons are members of the Mystical Body of Christ; expect to recognize Christ in every person you meet.

➤Learn the contemplative practices of your faith tradition and make them a part of your daily routine. Though God calls you to work actively to end oppression and poverty, regularly make time to commune with God through solitude, silence and prayer.

➤Forgive others and forgive yourself for the sins we all commit, the errors we all make. God's forgiveness is infinite, and so should ours.

Lessons on Spirituality from Thich Nhat Hanh

If I were also to invite Nhat Hanh to share his "Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life," these are the things he would want us to hear:

➤In all circumstances, whether mundane or extraordinary, be aware of the present moment. The spiritual life begins in mindfulness. No matter how strongly you are drawn to acts of compassion and justice, never neglect your spiritual practice.

➤Align yourself with a Sangha, a community of mindfulness practice. Without such a community of support, you will find it difficult to practice consistently on your own.

➤Cultivate awareness of interbeing, of your unity with all others. All beings have the buddha nature within them, whether they are aware of it or not.

➤Seek ways to make the ancient wisdom of the tradition meaningful for living in the present day. In all things, follow your own inner truth, even when it conflicts with established teaching.

➤Religious teaching and practice should be accessible to all persons, not just religious leaders or scholars. Learn these teachings and practices and reflect on them as a result of your own experience, but do not become attached to them as absolute truth.

➤Seek to do no harm. Embrace an attitude of non-harming. If you are able, take the vow not to kill or allow others to kill.

➤In a conflict, do not side with one group over against another. Recognize that the seeds of conflict are within all persons, even yourself. Seek reconciliation by cultivating compassion for all.

➤Look deeply to discover the causes of suffering. Awareness of suffering will make clear what means are needed to alleviate that suffering. Remember that whatever is going on in the world is going on in you, and vice versa.

➤Whatever your abilities--whether public speaking or artistic talents or organizational skills--develop them in such a way that they will water seeds of peace and compassion within yourself and others.

➤The path to all liberation begins in one person's mindfulness; nevertheless, personal liberation and social liberation are inseparable.

Uniting Spiritual Nurture and Acts of Compassion and Justice: A Comparison

Robert McAfee Brown has a phrase which describes how persons like Day and Nhat Hanh hold together the quiet and active dimensions of their spirituality in such a way that they do not fall into the trap of compartmentalizing and fracturing their experience of reality. He calls this attitude "withdrawal and return." Occasionally one must withdraw from the activity of everyday life in order to get in touch with the

deeper mysteries of life which can elude one in the midst of busyness. This is not to say that Divine Mystery cannot be found in the active life, but just that its presence often goes unrecognized when one's life is caught up in everyday turmoil. Speaking out of a Christian context, Brown explains that taking time to cultivate the presence of God through silence and solitude makes one more open to noting the presence of God in the noisy chaos of a busy life. He cautions, however, against seeing withdrawal and return as opposites, as if they imply a dualism in one's experience. This phrase actually comprises one movement and suggests a way that a person may concentrate on one part of their reality for a short period of time in order to both find some clarity about that reality and strengthen their encounter with other portions of reality.¹

Nhat Hanh's inclination toward withdrawal and return was vividly demonstrated in the way he retreated to Plum Village for five years following unsuccessful attempts to resettle refugees. He entered into a time of intense personal meditation, seeking direction for the liberation and peace movement of which he was the designated leader. In between speaking engagements, he still returns to Plum Village in the French countryside where he leads retreats or engages in quiet, personal pursuits, such as, writing or gardening. On a daily basis, he cultivates mindfulness through meditation. He also views his social activism as a form of meditation. In the following statement, he makes clear his contention that personal transformation and social change are undeniably intertwined:

Ideas about understanding and compassion are not understanding and compassion. Understanding and compassion must be real in our lives. They must be seen and touched. . . . First of all, realization means transforming ourselves. . . . Once we get in touch with the source of understanding and compassion, this transformation is realized and all our actions will naturally protect and enhance life.²

¹ Brown, 43-47.

² Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing*, 5.

Day's withdrawal often took contemplative forms, as in her routine of daily prayer and particularly in her confidence that she could turn to God in prayer when faced with an important decision or difficult situation. As an example, consider her prayer at the Cathedral in Washington, D.C. in 1932. Having just witnessed the Hunger March, a protest coordinated by Communists bringing a message of hope to the workers, she prayed that God would lead her to use her own talents on behalf of the poor. Upon returning home to New York, she met Peter Maurin and within months the Catholic Worker movement was launched. Consider also her enthusiasm for the Lacouture retreats, in which she could dwell in long periods of silent reflection. These retreats gave her the opportunity to withdraw from her daily encounters with the poor, not in order to forget the work at hand, but to seek spiritual refreshment and obtain greater clarity of mind and action.

One important contrast exists in the ways Day and Nhat Hanh understand the interrelationship between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, however. While they both agree that nurture and action are both absolutely necessary dimensions of the spiritual life which mutually support and transform each other, Nhat Hanh goes one step further than Day because he sees no essential distinction between meditation and action. He articulates his position, which is fully consistent with the teaching of Mahayana Buddhism, in the following passage:

Modern Christianity uses the ideas of vertical and horizontal theology. Spiritual life is the vertical dimension of getting in touch with God, while social life is the horizontal dimension of getting in touch with humans. In Buddhism, there are people who also think in these terms. They speak about the higher level of practicing the Buddha's Way and the lower level of helping living beings. But this understanding does not accord with the true spirit of Buddhism, which teaches that Buddhahood, the nature of enlightenment, is innate to every being and not just a transcendental identity. Thus, in Buddhism the vertical and horizontal are one. If we penetrate the horizontal, we find the vertical, and vice versa.³

³ Ibid., 4.

I believe Day would like Nhat Hanh's imagery of the horizontal and the vertical, not because she views them as strongly separate dimensions, but because the two lines form a cross. And for Day, the justification and motivation for her devotion to God and to serving the poor was, of course, the ministry, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus.

Both of these exemplars found within their religious traditions the beliefs and practices they needed to support the engaged spiritualities they lived. Day studied the Bible, primarily the life of Jesus, the writings of Christian theologians and saints, and, to a lesser extent, the social teaching of the Catholic Church in order to support and justify the social ministry in which she was engaged. Likewise, Nhat Hanh's thorough education in the teachings of the Buddha and *bodhisattvas* demonstrated to him that Buddhism should involve much more than sitting in quiet meditation, but also requires active immersion in the concerns of the world. Herein lies a substantial difference in their fundamental approaches to religious ideology: Day studied Christianity to find reasons to justify her beliefs in pacifism and social revolution and to support the social ministry in which she was already involved, whereas Nhat Hanh and his dharma brothers, when confronted with the suffering of war, were moved to respond with service as a natural outgrowth of their lifelong immersion in Buddhist teaching.

At the root of this difference is the discrepancy in primary orientations displayed by Day and Nhat Hanh. By temperament, Nhat Hanh is more a philosopher than an activist, more likely to write the slogans and poetry which uphold the movement than to take to the streets;⁴ Day is definitely more an activist than a philosopher, instinctively caring for the needy, defiantly marching in protests, and proudly serving a jail term. Even into her late seventies Day could be found serving food at the Catholic Worker house in New York; now in his seventies, Nhat

⁴ King, 349.

Hanh lectures internationally, explaining the philosophy of engaged Buddhism and teaching its meditation techniques. Thus, their activism takes different forms, one quiet and thoughtful, the other dynamic and in motion. Both, however, seek to change the world.

Their engaged spiritualities take on five manifestations, all of which are deeply shaped by the basic temperaments with which they approach the spiritual life. First, both Day and Nhat Hanh demonstrate a definite movement toward compassion, but seem to do so for different reasons. In her early years, Day experienced poverty and mistreatment because of her radical social views, thereby creating an opening for love of others and an impetus to express care for those in need. Her compassion is also an expression of her own guilt and shame as a result of mistakes she made as a young adult; in penance for her sins she seeks God's forgiveness through service to the poor and workers. Regarding Nhat Hanh's beginnings little is known, but we do know he was part of a handful of Buddhists who were involved in social ministries in Vietnam long before the United States became involved in the War. The roots of his compassion are clearly in the social teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. At the same time, he expresses compassion not merely out of religious obligation, but out of a personal desire to alleviate the suffering of others. Like Day, the ability to act with compassion has a deep source within Nhat Hanh, although, without more information about his childhood, it is difficult to know what that source might be. What is also true for both of them is that continued practice at expressing compassion deepened and strengthened that source.

A second manifestation of their engaged spiritualities is the unwavering pacifist stance they each took. Day first espoused the socialist viewpoint that the poor bear the greatest suffering as a result of a nation's military machine, i.e., money which could be used for the poor is channeled into weaponry and the poor are the ones who

are most likely to die as soldiers. Then, as a Catholic Christian, she used Jesus' pacifist teachings in the Sermon on the Mount as the rationale for the social revolution she was mounting. She consistently spoke of the contrast between the Works of Mercy and the works of war and she challenged governments, Christians, and the Church to decide which side they were on. During the Vietnam War she wrote:

We are among nations the most powerful, the most armed, and we are supplying arms and money to the rest of the world where we ourselves are not fighting. . . . The Works of Mercy are the opposite of the works of war, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, nursing the sick, visiting the prisoner. But we are destroying crops, setting fire to entire villages and to the people in them. . . . Maybe they are terrified, these Princes of the Church, as we are often terrified at the sight of violence. . . . I have often thought it is a brave thing to do, these Christmas visits to the American troops all over the world, Europe, Korea, Vietnam. But oh, God, what are all these Americans, so-called Christians, doing all over the world so far from our own shores?⁵

Nhat Hanh's pacifism, like his emphasis on compassion, grew out of Buddhist social teaching. His experiences during the War also contributed to a shift in ideological emphasis: while the Buddha clearly articulated a teaching of not harming other beings, Nhat Hanh embraced and now teaches a message of pacifism, stating in the twelfth mindfulness training of the Order of Interbeing "We are determined not to kill and not to let others kill."⁶ What makes Nhat Hanh's pacifism quite different from Day's is his insistence on neutrality, i.e., his unwillingness to side with either faction during conflict, but to instead express compassion for all who suffer as a result of anger and misunderstanding. Day, as we have seen, felt it was imperative to express her opposition to anyone who chose the works of war over the Works of Mercy, including the religious leaders of the Catholic Church.

Because pacifism is a prominent aspect of both Day's and Nhat Hanh's engaged spiritualities, an important question must be raised,

⁵ Day, "'In Peace is My Bitterness Most Bitter,'" 337-39. Used by permission of Orbis Books.

⁶ Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing*, 21.

namely, Is pacifism an essential component of an engaged spirituality? Elsewhere I have written about other individuals who have exhibited engaged spiritualities.⁷ The majority of those individuals--but certainly not all--took strong pacifist stances. My limited inquiry into the subject, comprising only ten lives, suggests that there is a high likelihood that persons who consciously seek to unite spiritual nurture and social justice aspects of religious expression will tend toward pacifism, even as there are some individuals who, as a result of their own convictions and particular cultural contexts, choose not to be pacifist.

Third, both of these engaged spiritualities are characterized by an emphasis on interdependence, fueled in large part by religious belief. Influenced by the Buddhist teaching of *pratityasamutpada*, or co-dependent origination, Nhat Hanh coined a new word--interbeing--to express the interrelatedness of all beings. "Perhaps," he wrote,

one can say that we are only alive when we live the life of the world, and so live the sufferings and joys of others. The suffering of others is our own suffering, and the happiness of others is our own happiness. . . . Having seen the reality of interdependence and entered deeply into its reality, nothing can oppress you any longer.⁸

Shaped as she was in a Christian context, Day's belief in the interdependence of all people was based on the Mystical Body of Christ, the mysterious relationship which exists between Christ and the Church through the Sacrament. As a result of this relationship, all people--not just Christians, not just Americans--are brothers and sisters in Christ and children of the one Father. Her firm conviction prompted her to conclude that "if men and women recognized this there would be no war."⁹ One interesting contrast between her viewpoint and that of Nhat Hanh's is the scope of their inclusivity: Day writes of the

⁷ Janet W. Parachin, *Engaged Spirituality: Ten Lives of Spiritual Nurture and Social Action* (St. Louis: Chalice), forthcoming.

⁸ Nhat Hanh, *Miracle of Mindfulness*, 49.

⁹ Miller, *All Is Grace*, 147.

interdependence of all people, while Nhat Hanh presupposes the interbeing of all reality, including people of past and future generations and all sentient beings.

Fourth, as a part of their engaged spiritualities, both Day and Nhat Hanh were empowered to be in relationship with "the other," those ideas, persons, and even shadow parts of themselves which were strange, different and sometimes frightening to behold. For instance, some of the ideas they embraced might be perceived as offering a direct challenge to the religious systems they held most dear. Day demonstrated an enduring interest in social theory and incorporated those issues into the purposes and practices of the Catholic Worker movement. Accordingly, her friendships with others crossed ideological and social boundaries, in keeping with her tendency to associate with those who shared her radical social viewpoint. Nhat Hanh also expressed a willingness to go beyond traditional Buddhist understandings of reality by seeking to know the beliefs of others. He wished to study non-Buddhist thought alongside Buddhism even though he was strongly discouraged by his teachers from doing so. While there is no definitive explanation for his interest, it is likely that he wanted to better understand and be in conversation with the western Christian influences which were dominant in his country.

"The other" also took the form of persons. Day sought to be in relationship with the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized members of society. She even expressed an affinity for people she did not know, persons as diverse as German and Japanese soldiers fighting against the Allies during World War II and blacks facing discrimination and death threats in the American South. She recognized the presence of Christ within them all.¹⁰ With others, like the archbishop of New York, she found the process more difficult. This is not to say she denied that

¹⁰ Ibid.; and Day, "War Without Weapons," 326-29.

the divine presence resided in the local leaders of the Church, but that her anger toward the Church for its seeming indifference toward the suffering of the masses often blocked her ability to be charitable toward those ecclesiastical leaders who refused to use their power to address the needs of the poor and the workers. In a similar way, she failed to do the intense personal searching which would have put her more in touch with "the other" within herself. I suggested earlier that Day may have feared that revealing too much of her colorful past would sour people on the Catholic Worker movement. For whatever reason, her failure to reflect on these issues even in her most private moments suggests that she, like most people, feared bringing to light her shadow self.

In contrast to Day, Nhat Hanh does not exhibit the same fear with regard to revealing his shadow self. He is candid in his viewpoint that every human person is a combination of violence and nonviolence, chaos and equilibrium, and that which is wholesome and unwholesome. He explains that Buddhist meditation enables one to get in touch with the roots of these tendencies so that one may water seeds of peace, compassion and mindfulness rather than seeds of violence, hatred and despair.¹¹ As we have seen, Nhat Hanh believes that the cultivation of personal harmony has a direct result on interpersonal and global harmony; it literally transforms one's encounters with others. A powerful example of this is Nhat Hanh's response to a man who verbally attacked him when he was touring the United States in 1968. Nhat Hanh met the man's angry words with compassion and gentleness. Peace activist Jim Forest observed: "In Nhat Hanh's response we had experienced an alternate possibility . . . of overcoming hatred with love, of breaking the seeming chain reaction of violence through human

¹¹ Nhat Hanh, *Touching Peace*, 23-25.

history."¹² Despite this and similar examples, we know little about Nhat Hanh's actual interaction with persons who are economically poor and marginalized by society. As a dharma teacher and head of a religious order, he leads retreats, gives lectures, and writes books, but seems to have little contact with the destitute and truly needy. While I would not doubt his compassion for all persons no matter what their social standing, I do wonder why fuller participation in the everyday concerns of these persons does not seem to be a priority for him. Perhaps this missing link is part of the reason why Forest's story cited above ends as it does: Nhat Hanh outwardly responded with calm and compassion, but inwardly contained so much anger that he hyperventilated in the church parking lot! The man's angry insistence that Nhat Hanh's compassion could best be exemplified by returning home and giving aid to the peasants undoubtedly struck a nerve.

Day and Nhat Hanh also relate in some way to "the other" I will call Divine Mystery. For Day, this other is clearly God, all-knowing, all-powerful, loving, and just. For Nhat Hanh, this other is comprised of neutral causes and conditions which influence the way persons think and act. He says that deep knowledge of and reflection upon these causes and conditions will lead to understanding, insight and compassion. While Day and Nhat Hanh do not share a common definition of who or what Divine Mystery is, they do agree that persons must live in awareness of its presence and seek to relate to it in some way. Day's relationship with God is personal and devotional, impelling her to seek God's guidance and do God's will. Nhat Hanh, by contrast, seeks to understand and ultimately transform causes and conditions so that their energy is positive rather than destructive.

A fifth manifestation of their engaged spiritualities is the intense anger both feel toward the existence of injustice and

¹² Forest, "Nhat Hanh," 103.

misunderstanding in the world. Nevertheless, they each have different responses to the anger they felt. Day, for the most part, was able to express her anger, often directing angry words at persons, governments and corporations who caused suffering or allowed injustice to continue unchecked. At the same time, there were some authority figures she did not publicly challenge, such as the Pope, the Roman Catholic Church, and God. Earlier I speculated on Day's relationship to the Church by noting that she was not born into Catholicism, but embraced it in adulthood. This fact may have made her tentative about speaking out against papal teachings even when those teachings were not sympathetic to the pacifist viewpoint. Her hesitancy may also be due in large part to the fear of being perceived as a disloyal Catholic, something which she never believed about herself but which, if proved, could have put the movement in jeopardy nonetheless.

By contrast, Nhat Hanh, who also knows anger in response to unjust suffering, does not openly express his anger. He is influenced by the Buddhist teaching which recognizes anger as a fleeting emotion which has great potential for destruction. This is not to say, however, that anger should be ignored or suppressed, but rather that it should be transformed into something positive. His view is compounded by the fact that he is always a guest in other countries (even in France where he makes his home), so he must be particularly careful that his expression of anger does not impact negatively on the people he represents, i.e., the people of Vietnam who cannot speak for themselves.

Day and Nhat Hanh each expressed the union of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice in a way which was unique for their own temperaments, social situations, and religious commitments. Shifting the focus somewhat, I now move from a comparison of their respective engaged spiritualities to a consideration of the formative

influences which helped to shape and sustain their commitment to living an engaged spirituality.

Formative Influences: A Comparison

By now it is clear that Buddhist social teaching has been extremely influential in the formation of Nhat Hanh's engaged spirituality. His education in the teachings of the Buddha and *bodhisattvas* has been most thorough. Even more, as a dharma teacher, he has had the opportunity to shape Buddhist teaching by offering his own interpretations of the ancient sutras. His experiences with the suffering of war also contributed a practical element to his understanding of the social teaching: by placing the experience of suffering in conversation with the traditional teachings he is able to reinterpret those teachings for the contemporary generation. This process continues even today as he seeks to modernize Buddhist teachings for seekers in the west.

By contrast, Catholic social teaching could not be considered a crucial influence for Day. Peter Maurin, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, had invited Day to be his compatriot in a revolution based on social criticism and Roman Catholic social teaching. The latter was his forte, while she was much more knowledgeable about the former. She always maintained that the primary sources for the *Catholic Worker* were the Bible, the words of Jesus, the sayings of the saints, and the encyclicals of the Popes.¹³ To this list I would add her experiences with the poor and the workers as well as the implicit influence of socialist writers. All of these other sources were much more prominent in guiding the direction of the *Worker* than Catholic social teaching. It is most interesting to note, however, that despite

¹³ Roberts, 105.

Day's lack of strong reliance upon this source, her work and witness were instrumental in moving the Catholic Church toward acceptance of pacifism, not as the only perspective for Catholics, but certainly as one of several viable ideological options.

Another formative influence which is important for both Day and Nhat Hanh is regular, disciplined contemplative practice. These practices are not limited to religious ritual only, but also include other activities intended to quiet the mind and awaken the spirit. Nhat Hanh's primary contemplative practice has always been mindfulness meditation, in which Buddhist practitioners spend literally hours sitting still, observing the breath as well as the thoughts and emotions which arise in the mind. He also engages in walking meditation, gardening, and writing. Day, before she joined the Catholic Church in her twenties, kept a daily journal and took long walks into the city neighborhoods where the poor lived. Undoubtedly, one of the primary reasons she was drawn to the Catholic Church in the first place was for its ritual and sacramental theology, a contemplative aspect she sorely missed in her life. Throughout her life, she drew strength and received sustenance from the Mass, personal prayer, reading the Bible, going on retreat, and her writing. Day's ministry with the poor also had distinctly contemplative aspects, for it was in the poor and the worker that Day sensed the presence of God most strongly.

While contemplation clearly plays a pivotal role in the expression of both of their engaged spiritualities, there are some crucial differences between them. As I noted earlier, Nhat Hanh is, by temperament, more contemplative than Day. His understanding of Buddhism is shaped primarily by the practice of mindfulness meditation. As a result, he could go months--even years--without engaging in social action of any kind, spending long periods in meditation alone. He would not say that he was inactive during these times, only that he was

preparing his mind for that time when conditions were right for active engagement. Remember, for Nhat Hanh meditation and action are one. Day, on the other hand, could not conceive of weeks without active involvement with the poor or speaking out against war. The Kingdom of God heralded by Christ, she believed, could not be brought about by wishful thinking or pious platitudes, but by social revolution. Of course, prayer, participation in the sacraments, and going on retreat are integral to growing in relationship with God and coming to better understand the ministry to which one has been called, but, in the end, it is not primarily prayer but action that Day believed would bring about social change.

These and other differences between the two expressions of contemplative practice have a great deal to do with the philosophical differences between Buddhism and Christianity. Buddhism and Christianity describe the purpose of contemplative practice in different ways: Buddhist meditation seeks the collapsing of the subject/object dualism, thereby awakening the practitioner to the true nature of reality; Christian contemplation enables the practitioner to deepen their relationship to God or Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Buddhist meditation is non-personal, while Christian contemplation is built on a personal relationship between the believer and God.¹⁴ Perhaps it is true, as Ninian Smart argues, that the deeper phenomenology of contemplative practice is the same, whether one pursues the non-personal Buddhist approach or the personal Christian approach.¹⁵ I am not certain whether one can know for sure unless one has pursued both methods. From an observer's point of view, at least, it seems that the philosophical differences hold true, even if experiential differences are not immediately evident. To conclude, I will reiterate

¹⁴ Ninian Smart, *Buddhism and Christianity: Rivals and Allies* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 44.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

what I know to be true about Day and Nhat Hanh: they intentionally sought out opportunities for meditation, contemplation, prayer and reflection, and they confirmed that these experiences sustained them through times of difficulty and provided the impetus for the activism they carried out throughout their lives.

Just as contemplative practices influenced the form of these two engaged spiritualities, so too has ongoing social action helped Day and Nhat Hanh to define themselves and give shape to their spiritual journeys. For both of these persons, social action has had two primary expressions: pacifism and aiding the suffering. In keeping with their belief in interdependence, they have tended to see the interrelationship between these two concerns, although their differing contexts have defined how they address this interrelationship. For example, Day spoke out against United States involvement in numerous wars, cognizant of the ways in which war is an expression of a government's quest for international power and how the nation's poor bear the financial burden of American foreign policy. Nhat Hanh, by contrast, was an eyewitness to war's devastating effects in Vietnam. For the poor villagers, war was not just a financial hardship, but fully a life and death struggle. Therefore, bringing an end to war would alleviate a great deal of the people's immediate suffering. In a sense, Nhat Hanh's pacifist perspective was more existential than Day's, although they held certain philosophical outlooks in common.

Cynthia Eller, who has studied Buddhist and Christian expressions of pacifism, describes three ways in which they are similar.¹⁶ First, Buddhists and Christians use similar arguments to support their pacifist stance. They say that good ends cannot be achieved through violent means, and that although violence may seem to produce acceptable short-term results, in the long run, violence only adds misery upon

¹⁶ This description is found in Eller, 99-101.

misery for all people. Pacifists are also likely to believe that self-sacrifice is necessary to achieve a nonviolent world, and that love, which is much stronger than evil, will win out in the end. By now it is clear that arguments similar to these were often put forth by Day and Nhat Hanh to support their pacifist viewpoints.

Second, both Buddhist and Christian pacifists tend to view themselves as outside the political arena. They seek to detach themselves wholly, or partially, from politics and the workings of government. Their belief is that government leaders desperately need military might in order to protect their political power. Therefore, those who stand outside the system are in a better position philosophically and morally to challenge the efficacy of violence. This aspect is also in keeping with the teachings and actions of Day and Nhat Hanh, who, rather than becoming career politicians used their writing and speaking abilities and personal witness to challenge the status quo.

Finally, both Buddhist and Christian pacifists choose social, rather than political, means to address the problem of violence in the world. They do not seize the reins of government or run for political office, although they do embark on social service projects and seek to ease suffering in everyday life. For these individuals, the personal is indeed political, and they are convinced that, no matter how small their actions may seem to be, the impact of those actions is large and powerful in its own way. This third aspect may explain why Day and Nhat Hanh have both tended to couple their outspoken pacifism with works of compassion for those in need: social change requires social action and, while their words might influence the political system over the long haul, their actions could make a real difference in the lives of needy people now.

Another formative influence for Day and Nhat Hanh are those exemplars who demonstrate the way one may travel the spiritual journey with courage and faith. Day was deeply touched by the life of Jesus, and she studied the lives of the Christian saints and read novels whose characters struggled with the challenges of applying faith to everyday situations. Similarly, Nhat Hanh studies and commends to others the teachings of the Buddha and the revered Buddhist *bodhisattvas* whose words and actions are an inspiration to many.

Both Day and Nhat Hanh would agree that an even better way to learn from exemplars is to work beside them, observing their struggles and triumphs and learning to view the world with eyes of compassion. Neither Day nor Nhat Hanh limit their circle of exemplars to members of their own religious traditions, but recognize that commitment to peace, justice, love and compassion crosses ideological, religious and social barriers. Day, for instance, did not learn only from Roman Catholic Christians, but counted among her exemplars socialists, atheists, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Likewise, Nhat Hanh is inspired by persons of all religions and social standings who practice the awareness and compassion characteristic of engaged Buddhism. He often counsels such persons *not* to become Buddhists, but to be agents of transformation within their own religious traditions.

Finally, participation in a practicing community is perhaps the most important of all the formative influences on Day and Nhat Hanh, for it is descriptive of both who these individuals are and how they live their engaged spiritualities. A most interesting observation is that both of these persons stress that the type of the community which encourages the union of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice may vary, but, when confronted with choosing the type of

community which would be most supportive for them in their own spiritual journeys, they each settled on a monastic model for community life.

Nhat Hanh's understanding of community is shaped almost exclusively by his sixty plus years as a monk. When he is not traveling, he lives in Plum Village, a retreat center and Buddhist Sangha made up of religious and laypersons committed to following the principles of engaged Buddhism. He encourages others to form similar Sanghas in their own communities. Because the Sangha is a voluntary community, comprised of persons who have taken specific vows as well as many who are still seeking, he does not think of the Sangha as a traditional monastic community, but more as a "second family."¹⁷ This community should be modeled after the extended families of the past in which all members give guidance, encouragement, and support to one another. In the Sangha, however, most members are not blood relatives and the emphasis is on creating an environment where people can be successful in their practice of mindfulness and compassion.¹⁸ Remember also Nhat Hanh's counsel that a Sangha only requires two persons who decide to practice together. Of course, those two, once they have developed trust and compassion for one another, may reach out to a third, a fourth, and many more.¹⁹ In addition, he broadens the meaning of Sangha to include more than just human members: the trees, birds, meditation cushion, mindfulness bell and the air one breathes are also members of one's Sangha.²⁰

Day's primary community at the Catholic Worker house settled into a monastic cycle of work and prayer and adhered to the Benedictine values of practicing hospitality and seeking to live as Christ lived,²¹ but the other communities with which she was associated were quite

¹⁷ Nhat Hanh, *Touching Peace*, 106.

¹⁸ Nhat Hanh, *Teachings on Love*, 134.

¹⁹ Nhat Hanh, *Touching Peace*, 106-07.

²⁰ Nhat Hanh, *Teachings on Love*, 139.

²¹ Merriman, 81-100.

different. The socialists convened around an agenda of social change and actions in support of that ideology. Peace activists--many of whom were religious in their orientation--pooled their resources to seek an end to war. Members of the Roman Catholic Church came together to partake of the rituals of the Church, but often failed to enact any efforts toward bettering the lot of society's poor. For Day, the Catholic Worker movement was one community which combined the best of these other groups--activism toward social change, the pursuit of the end of war, and contemplative practice. This fact did not deter her from seeking the company of persons in these other communities, but her primary community remained the Catholic Worker house throughout her life.

These then are the primary formative influences which contribute to the blossoming of engaged spirituality in the lives of Day and Nhat Hanh: the social teachings of their respective religious traditions, disciplined contemplative practice, involvement in social action, learning from exemplars, participation in community. These factors, so influential in shaping the engaged spiritualities of these two individuals, are crucial building blocks in the description of Christian religious education which teaches and nurtures an engaged spirituality.

Conclusion

The uniting of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice demonstrated by Day and Nhat Hanh is not altogether unique, although it may be considered uncommon. Just a handful of other names immediately come to mind: Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Elie Wiesel, Rabindranath Tagore, and Joanna Macy. What allows these persons to immerse themselves in the affairs of the world in such a way that their spiritual sensibilities are expanded, not

limited? Nelson Foster believes that this ability to bring together the quiet and active dimensions of spirituality in perfect harmony requires more than just knowing one's tradition or the ability to delineate the causes of societal conflict and suffering; it requires another kind of insight, a type of wisdom which only comes from religion.²² As we have seen, both Day and Nhat found the impetus and support for their engaged spiritualities from the teachings and practices of their own religious traditions. This thought provides not only an appropriate conclusion to this inquiry, but also provides an excellent segue into the final task of this project--to describe a model for Christian religious education which brings together the spiritually nurturing and socially active dimensions of engaged spirituality.

²² Nelson Foster, "To Enter the Marketplace," in *The Path of Compassion*, ed. Eppsteiner, 60.

CHAPTER 6
CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
FOR AN ENGAGED SPIRITUALITY

I began this project by affirming that life itself is the classroom for education, and that the theory and practice of education are necessarily interrelated. The lives of our exemplars--Dorothy Day and Nhat Hanh--gloriously testify to the truth of these affirmations. They viewed every incident, from the beholding of a flower to an encounter with a suffering person, as an opportunity to learn, to reflect, to grow, and to act in response to their deepest religious convictions. What they did was most certainly shaped by what they knew, but what they believed to be true was also profoundly influenced by what they experienced in the world.

I hope to maintain this broad perspective and continue to nurture the interplay between theory and practice in this present chapter. Drawing upon the opening discussion about the union of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, the survey and critique of religious education theory and method, and the extensive inquiry into the lives of Day and Nhat Hanh, I seek now to accomplish three tasks: First, I describe what Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality looks like, both the theoretical basis for such a program and the practical application, particularly with regard to choosing curriculum and engaging in the teaching and learning process. Second, I reflect on the unique features of my model for Christian religious education, explaining how my theoretical framework and educational guidelines are quite different from those which have come before. Finally, I delineate several recommendations for further research.

Along the journey I consciously seek to present a theory which overcomes the critiques with which I began this study, namely, the narrow view of spirituality which identifies "the spiritual" solely with interior religious devotion thereby refusing to see the interrelationship between contemplative practice and social action, and the failure to look to exemplars for inspiration and guidance in living this integrated, holistic spiritual life. Because neither Day nor Nhat Hanh fell into these traps, they provide a window into a spirituality which combines both engagement with the nurturing resources of their faith traditions and engagement with the concerns of the world.

Christian Religious Education for an Engaged Spirituality

Taking to heart the lessons on spirituality and the various formative influences which give shape to and sustain engaged spirituality for Day and Nhat Hanh, it is now time to develop a model for religious education which intentionally teaches and nurtures an engaged spirituality in the context of a Christian community of faith. Here I describe the salient features of my model, beginning with its theoretical grounding and continuing with an explication of the curriculum and process of teaching and learning which support that theory.

A Theory of Religious Education Uniting Spiritual Nurture and Acts of Compassion and Justice

Earlier I borrowed Robert Pazmiño's "educational trinity"¹ as a template for developing my own understanding of religious education. Let me note again that when Pazmiño talks of Christian education as a process incorporating information, formation, and transformation, he writes from a particular perspective--that of an evangelical Christian. In keeping with the concerns of evangelical Christianity, his theory

¹ Pazmiño, 61.

strongly emphasizes personal conversion, conforming to Christian values and way of life, and bringing all persons and groups in harmony with the will of God for the world. What makes his theory an expansion of the evangelical viewpoint, however, is his insistence on the corporate dimension of conversion as a necessary complement to the personal dimension, for he believes that the transformative power of Christian education reaches individuals, communities, societies and structures, making all of these expressions of God's reign through Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.²

I approach Pazmiño's trinity not as an evangelical Christian, but as a progressive Christian with decidedly evangelical influences. More specifically, I wish to hold together both the contemplative and active aspects of religious expression. While Pazmiño provides an excellent beginning for a theory of religious education which incorporates spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, he does not go far enough in articulating a theory which addresses the issues which shape the global context of progressive Christianity, namely, a concern for the growth of faith in the midst of a myriad of religious options and the desire to combine personal religious meaning with deep social awareness.

I would, therefore, expand the meaning of each branch of Pazmiño's "educational trinity" to be inclusive of what it means to provide religious education in the midst of this global context, with particular attention to the religiously pluralistic environment in which this education takes place and the inclination to unite spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. Thus, in the re-making of Pazmiño's theory, the sharing of *information* becomes much more than the passing on of the Christian story: seeking information necessarily includes uncovering those truths which are to be found in many traditions and

² Ibid., 55-56, 61.

stories, not just in the Christian religion or in Christian lives. While teaching the Bible and the history of the faith remain foundational for Christian education, teaching respect for and openness to the ways of others is needed as well.

Formation becomes much more than leading persons to conform to the values, attitudes and lifestyle seen as normative for the Christian community: teaching for spiritual formation takes account of the exemplars of every time, place, and religious faith who have striven to incorporate both the nurturing and socially active dimensions of spirituality. Formation also takes account of the differences among individuals, allowing them to grow into the person God is calling them to be, while, at the same time, encouraging within them an openness to the unique movement of God in the lives of others.

Finally, I agree with Pazmiño that *transformation* is meant to touch the whole realm of God's world, but I do not believe that it is limited to only a Christian interpretation of how God's shalom will manifest itself on earth: belief in transformation requires a concomitant trust in the mystery of God who has chosen to bless the world with a variety of persons who express a multitude of understandings and interpretations of how the world is moving toward God's vision of wholeness. Personal and social change are integrally related: changes in the world affect our individual lives, just as even small changes in our personal lives have an impact on the world--its people, communities, and natural habitat. The great task of religious education is to enable persons to catch that vision of wholeness and interdependence through study, reflection, contemplation and action. The fruit of religious education is persons' participation in the manifestation of God's shalom on earth.

With this as a general introduction, let me now describe the essential principles which undergird a theory of Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality:

This theory affirms that spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice are mutually supportive and transformative. Our exemplars clearly demonstrate that the religious life is not comprised of prayer and devotion only, nor is it only outward acts of care. To fully live the spiritual life requires attention to both the inward and outward dimensions of faith; religious life requires both being *and* doing. Therefore, religious education should seek to nurture people in their inward devotion *and* impel them toward acts of compassion and justice. Furthermore, spiritual nurture and engaging in compassionate acts are not discrete elements of the spiritual life, but integrated and complementary aspects of spiritual expression. This integration has two aspects: First, the relationship is reciprocal in that engagement with spiritual resources leads to social action which leads one back to the spiritual resources and so on; there is a cycle of withdrawal and return which gives energy to the spiritual life.³ Secondly, participation in spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice are overlapping dimensions of spirituality so that the challenges of one are met in the benefits of the other, and vice versa; in other words, the bringing together of nurture and action provides a completeness to the spiritual life that could never be found if a person devoted herself to one or the other only.

Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality is characterized by radical interdependence. Remember Nhat Hanh's belief that interbeing is the principle undergirding all reality. Somewhat differently, Day maintains that one person's actions on behalf of peace

³ See Brown, 43-49.

or in loving service to another create a ripple effect which impacts many more others in ways one could never imagine. Thus, to be true to this model, religious education must address a wide circle of needs and concerns, including those of individuals, communities, societies, nations, and the natural world. Any model of religious education which focuses on only one or two of these areas is partial. Engaged spirituality recognizes that God is active in the whole world, not just in one person's life or in the activities of one congregation or religious group. Therefore, Christians must be involved with God's whole world, not just part of it. Of course, no one person or group can address every issue or pursue every cause, for to do so would be impossible and impractical. Rather, the reality of interdependence provides the context within which spiritual formation and the pursuit of justice are carried out: the taking up of one cause sparks reflection on how other causes are affected by that decision, and meditation on Christian lifestyle compels one to discover how personal choices impact other beings throughout the world.

The context of Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality is the community of faith. Engaged spirituality is always nurtured by a community of belief and practice in the midst of a particular culture in a certain time and place. As a rule, individuals do not become spiritual social activists on their own, but are guided and sustained in their efforts to live integrated spiritual lives by learning from the teachings, practices, and exemplars of engaged spirituality. Most often, these persons are members of a historic faith tradition, sometimes representing one's own faith tradition, sometimes another. But Day and Nhat emphatically agree on this point: align yourself with a community of belief and practice for the ongoing challenge and support it provides.

Religious education for an engaged spirituality must draw from the whole life of the community, not just from what happens in so-called "educational" events, such as Sunday School or church-sponsored workshops. Therefore, educators need to be attentive to all the ways in which the congregation educates by what it says and does, as well as by what it fails to say and do. In an even larger context, the church has a significant role to play in modeling the type of community of belief and practice it purports to be: the church--as one manifestation of the way God is at work in the world--may be a symbol to all people of God's shalom, peace, or wholeness. This witness may inspire others to seek God's face and do God's will as they are called within their own contexts.

Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality affirms both personal and corporate responsibility. As individual persons and as members of a community of faith, persons are called to reflect deeply on the causes of and antidotes to suffering in the world. The lives of Nhat Hanh and Day clearly demonstrate that true contemplative practice makes it impossible for persons to dismiss easily their own culpability by pointing fingers at others as the guilty culprits. Likewise, true commitment to social action makes it impossible for them to address the causes of social problems without considering how their own personal choices contribute to those problems.

In talking about responsibility in the context of peace education in North America, Betty Reardon makes an important distinction between responsibility *for* and responsibility *to*: she says that persons need to accept their responsibility *for* the ways in which their own style of living and lack of international awareness contribute to the oppression of others. Therefore, North Americans also have a responsibility *to* the

others of the world with whom they are indelibly linked.⁴ Her distinction is extremely helpful in seeing the fundamental relationship between personal and corporate responsibility: because personal actions often reflect corporate values, acceptance of personal responsibility requires meditation upon unconscious attitudes. This contemplative practice may in turn lead one to engage in acts of personal restitution or even attempt large scale social change. As we have seen, Nhat Hanh is perhaps more willing than Day to explore these unconscious motivations, although both readily recognize the personal and corporate dimensions of responsibility.

Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality cultivates mystery, awe, and wonder. Perhaps the greatest gift contemplative practice has to offer is the affirmation that a mystical, unknown reality exists beyond what is perceived and known in this world. In Christianity this mystery is called "God" or "Spirit," while other religious traditions might use a different designation. Sadly, this sense of mystery is often missing in those who are drawn to the more active dimension of spirituality, perhaps because human beings have become so accustomed to running the world and adjusting its features to meet their own wants. Maybe people have come to believe God can be controlled in a similar way. Also, along with the demythologizing of the Bible and advances in science and technology has come a loss of wonder at the mysterious workings of a God whose ways are not human ways, whose thoughts surpass human thoughts.

Engaged spirituality seeks to make deep contact with the mysterious through ongoing spiritual nurture and engaging in acts of compassion and justice. It continually affirms that all things come from and return to God. As religious writer Evelyn Underhill states,

⁴ Betty A. Reardon, *Comprehensive Peace Education: Educating for Global Responsibility* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), 62-63.

"the life of the Spirit meets us at all times and places . . . [and] is independent of and precedes any explanation or rationalization."⁵

People can seek to discern God's vision for the future through prayer, study of scripture, meditation, and trial and error. Though the vision is ultimately God's, we as God's people have a hand in shaping it and bringing it to fruition.

Mystics of all times and places and religious persuasions have practiced releasing or surrendering their own personal will to a Wisdom greater than their own. Padraic O'Hare calls this quality "emptiness": by emptying oneself of selfish desires, one creates space so that God can fill the mind and heart, leading one to compassionate action.⁶ Our exemplars further demonstrate that an important result of surrender to mystery is personal detachment from the outcome of social action. Nhat Hanh refers to this as nonattachment to outcome, while Day simply affirms that her work prospers according to the will of God. Detachment, as practiced by Christians, is not an "I don't care what happens" attitude, but rather a willingness to do the work one has been called to do, while releasing the future to the wisdom of a loving, compassionate, and just God.

Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality affirms that the pursuit of truth, compassion, peace, and justice supersedes sectarianism and dogma. At the very least religious education should foster respect for ideologies other than one's own. Even better, religious education should engender a deep appreciation of other traditions so that meaningful interchange can occur between persons who follow different ideological paths. I agree with Mary Elizabeth Moore who says that education requires not only empowering people to name the

⁵ Evelyn Underhill, *The Life of the Spirit and the Life Today* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922), 5.

⁶ O'Hare, *Way of Faithfulness*, 18-19.

world as they experience it, but to assist them in hearing and understanding how others name the world as well.⁷ Religious education should never be a closed system with rigid, impermeable boundaries. Instead, it should have somewhat permeable boundaries which allow it to be inclusive of differing viewpoints contained within its own religious tradition and to be regularly in dialogue with persons who represent other patterns of thought and behavior. This is the witness of Day and Nhat Hanh who were able to clearly articulate their own positions while remaining open to listen to and learn from the viewpoints of others.

Of course, inclusivity presents the danger that boundaries can become too permeable, maybe even nonexistent. This is why an engaged spirituality should ideally arise out of a historic religious tradition and in the context of a practicing faith community. The religious tradition and faith community provide boundaries; likewise, engaged spirituality itself--with its emphases on spiritual nurture, contemplative practice, deep compassion, and the pursuit of peace and justice--provides boundaries. In this way, persons of differing backgrounds living an engaged spirituality can become partners who offer inspiration and encouragement to one another.

Is it possible, then, to say that all of these religious traditions are "true"? Within the boundaries set by a commitment to engaged spirituality, I believe it is imperative that Christians affirm the truth of other religious paths. Parker Palmer explains that the word truth originally comes from "troth," meaning a covenant, pledge, or relationship of trust and faith. Contrary to what many believe, truth should not be conceived as knowledge just waiting to be discovered, existing in isolation from the persons who apprehend it; truth is only to be found in the relationships formed between the knower and what is

⁷ Moore, 187.

known, and between the persons who participate in the knowing.⁸

Authentic spirituality, according to Palmer, requires an openness to truth--this relationship of trust and faith--wherever it might be found and from whomever might offer it. Such a spirituality does not so much *prescribe* what one ought to believe as much as it *affirms* that knowledge can be found along any pathway walked with integrity.⁹

This, then, is the type of openness I envision as an aspect of Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality: one which fosters admiration for the exemplars of engaged spirituality in all religious traditions and is able to recognize the truths contained within teachings and practices from traditions which are different from one's own. Admittedly, my perspective is shaped by my progressive Christian viewpoint, and it is unlikely to be shared by others who do not have such an expansive understanding of what constitutes "truth." For instance, Christians who are part of evangelical or fundamentalist traditions usually limit what is "true" to that which is revealed in the Bible. Therefore, they would not concur with me that Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, and even atheists know truth and have much to teach Christians about its apprehension. Nevertheless, engaged spirituality finds expression in these more conservative communities as well. Note, for instance, the example of Anna Griffith in chapter one: her fundamentalist context did not prevent her from seeking a relationship with persons living with AIDS; rather, her deep religious commitment enabled her to go beyond existing patterns to fashion a new response combining engagement with the nurturing resources of her tradition and the determination to act with compassion. Hence, even in a more conservative setting, the living of an engaged spirituality seems to

⁸ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 31, 55-56.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xi.

require a willingness to dialogue with and listen to those perspectives which exist outside of one's purview. A larger understanding of what constitutes truth may assist in that dialogue, but may not be required for it to occur.

Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality embraces change as a necessary part of the learning process. Spiritual growth, in both its inward and outward manifestations, comes as a result of change. Indeed, the very word "growth" denotes change, signaling slow, developmental movement, or sudden, disorienting transformation, or something in between. Nhat Hanh calls this transformation "enlightenment" and believes it can only be the result of mindfulness meditation. Day's understanding of change is best described as a nonviolent social revolution whose aim is the realization of the Kingdom of God. For both persons, however, the changes which take place are personal, social, global and even cosmic in their scope.

The experience of change is real for individuals, communities, societies, nations, and the natural world. On the individual level, religious education can support and guide persons as they make the transition through the different stages of life, i.e., from childhood to adolescence to adulthood and beyond. It can also prepare persons for important life events, such as graduation, marriage, divorce, parenthood, job loss, and death. On the interpersonal and corporate level, religious education can enable couples, families, small groups, and whole congregations to acknowledge and embrace the changes which are an ongoing reality of life. Even more, persons who are firmly grounded in communal relationships and in the beliefs and practices of an intentional faith community are more likely to accept the changes--both large and small--which accompany the decision to embark on an unknown path.

The biblical concept which points to the importance of change is conversion, literally meaning "to turn in another direction." Conversion always involves intentional movement toward something else, such as a new way of believing or acting. While conservative Christians have heralded the call to personal conversion, liberal Christians have tended to downplay the personal dimension of conversion, calling instead for a transformation of communities and structures. I believe, however, that the lessons of engaged spirituality make it clear that conversion is needed in both its individual and corporate dimensions. Mary Boys successfully captures this multi-layered aspect when she says that conversion is "a profoundly personal journey with serious ramifications both for the religious community and for society as a whole."¹⁰ She makes an important point: conversion finds its beginning in the individual. The lives of our exemplars strongly affirm this assertion. The conversion of one person and then many toward a particular way of thinking, believing, and acting has the power to change communities, institutions, and whole societies.

Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality honors differences in temperament and ability among persons who seek to live holistically. Different persons approach the spiritual life from different orientations, some being more naturally contemplative or active. Parker Palmer calls attention to this fact in *The Active Life*. Noting the age-old struggle between the "opposites" of contemplation and action, he suggests a truce be called in which people recognize first that different people have different callings, and second, that contemplation and action are not contradictions at all, but two poles of a great paradox.¹¹ As we have already seen, Day and Nhat Hanh each exhibited a unique temperament, with Day more clearly the activist to

¹⁰ Boys, *Educating in Faith*, 204.

¹¹ Palmer, *Active Life*, 6-7.

Nhat Hanh's contemplative. Nevertheless, they also broadened their spiritual sensibilities to embrace the "great paradox" and express an engaged spirituality.

Another way of describing spiritual temperaments has been developed by Urban Holmes.¹² Adapting and expanding upon his work, Corinne Ware has delineated four types of spirituality: Type 1 is Speculative/Kataphatic Spirituality, what Ware refers to as a "Head Spirituality." Those inclined toward this form exhibit a thinking spirituality expressed in concepts and are most inclined to nurture their spirituality through study groups, thought-provoking sermons, and theological reflection. Type 2 is Affective/Kataphatic Spirituality, or a "Heart Spirituality." The emphasis here is on personal renewal. Like Type 1 spirituality, a person inclined toward Type 2 will speak of God in anthropomorphic terms and place the spoken and written word at the center of religious experience, but unlike Type 1 people will combine this intellectual emphasis with an affective, charismatic spirituality which emphasizes evangelism, conversion, the immanence of God, and extemporaneous prayer. Type 3 is Affective/Apophatic Spirituality, or a "Mystic Spirituality." Type 3 people are more inclined to listen, rather than speak, to God. They will emphasize the individual journey of faith, seeking union with God, focusing on their own inner world, and participating in contemplative, introspective and intuitive forms of

¹² Urban T. Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction* (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1980). Holmes' system is composed of two intersecting lines forming four types of spiritual expression. The vertical scale denotes the speculative-affective dimension. This refers to the contrast between a head-oriented spirituality--speculative, rational, and cognitive--and a spirituality of the heart--affective and emotional. The horizontal scale is apophatic-kataphatic, suggesting two different ways of imaging the divine. Apophatic derives from a Greek word meaning "negative," denoting the refusal to conceptualize God in any form other than Divine Mystery. Kataphatic means "affirmative" and entails actively imaging God using biblical or other images. See Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban, 1995), 31-32.

prayer. Type 4 is Speculative/Apophatic Spirituality, or a "Kingdom Spirituality." This person combines the intellectual approach of the speculative dimension with the non-imaging approach of the apophatic dimension. This is the active visionary who exhibits a crusading type of spirituality. A Type 4 individual exhibits a passion to transform society and a willingness to make personal sacrifices to make this a reality. For this person, prayer and action are one.¹³

If engaged spirituality had to be classified as one of these types, it would most nearly correspond to Type 4. At the same time, though, engaged spirituality can easily incorporate aspects of the other three types. For instance, in Day's life story we see clear examples of head spirituality (e.g., socialist interpretation of society), heart spirituality (deep compassion for the poor), mystic spirituality (her view of the Eucharist), and imaging spirituality (seeing Christ in everyone she met). The reader is invited to look for similar variety in the spiritual life of Thich Nhat Hanh.

Another way of interpreting individual spiritual orientation is through the use of the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). John Ackerman describes the various personality patterns which can be surmised through the use of the MBTI. This tool provides persons with a clear indication of their personality type while identifying those weaknesses which block personal and spiritual growth. Awareness of these tendencies can lead one to embrace a more holistic spirituality.¹⁴

While Ware and Ackerman develop different typologies, they offer similar conclusions: there is no "perfect" spiritual or personality type, for all persons are born with certain tendencies. The goal of spiritual and personal growth, therefore, is to seek integration, wholeness, and balance, striving to incorporate those spiritual and

¹³ Ware, 37-45.

¹⁴ Ackerman, 40-47.

personal qualities which are underdeveloped or have been neglected in one's own personality. This is an exciting process which takes a lifetime.

Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality requires sustained commitment to both spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. Palmer also notes the frenzy that often accompanies the spiritual life: unable to perceive the great paradox of contemplation-and-action, individuals either consistently choose one pole, fully ignoring the demands of the other, or they wildly vacillate between the two, finding no satisfaction in either one. Integration of the two only becomes possible when a person recognizes the paradox that contemplation and action are inextricably bound up with each other and that they cannot be separated.¹⁵ For this reason, education for an engaged spirituality demands sustained commitment to both poles of the great paradox: sustained commitment to acting with justice and compassion, not sporadic acts of charity, and sustained engagement with those resources which nurture the spiritual life, not just once a week church attendance. Engaged spirituality requires compassion, not sentimentality, and relationship, not occasional encounter.

Because theory and practice are interrelated, a theory is more than just what it says it is, but also what it hopes to accomplish and how well it succeeds in doing so. In the following two sections on "Curriculum" and "Teaching and Learning" I focus more on what this theory seeks to accomplish in the life of the Christian congregation by looking at the content and process of teaching for an engaged spirituality.

¹⁵ Palmer, *Active Life*, 15-16.

Curriculum

Again let me reiterate my belief that the curriculum of religious education is contained within everything the church says and does, and even what it fails to do and say. With this in mind, I highlight five types of curricula which inform the content of religious education for an engaged spirituality.

Written curriculum. Since most congregations make use of some type of written curriculum, I think it is important to call attention to some of its limitations with regard to religious education for an engaged spirituality. First of all, written curriculum is always incomplete. Unless it is developed for the specific needs of a particular congregation, it is undoubtedly a generic, one-size fits all program. It must be adapted to the skill level of the persons utilizing it and to the concerns of the immediate situation. Secondly, while many religious education curricula offer ideas for both spiritual nurture and compassionate action, just the mere presence of a prayer or the suggestion that the students carry out a social action project does not necessarily indicate that the curriculum is stressing an engaged spirituality. If the congregation as a whole does not teach engaged spirituality, or if a particular teacher is uncomfortable with either of its two components, then the dualism can be reinforced. The real challenge is to infuse the curriculum with both spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice so that *both* find expression in a balanced, holistic way.

Whenever written curriculum is employed, teachers should be encouraged to read it from the viewpoint of engaged spirituality, looking for an emphasis on nurturing Christian faith and expressing that faith through acts of compassion and justice, and whether the two are placed in opposition to each other or integrated with one another.

Educational leaders should work with teachers so that they can adapt what they have received to make it sensitive to the concerns of an engaged spirituality.

The faith tradition. Mary Boys points out that "tradition" is often misunderstood as something which is static and only interested in preserving the past. Tradition is really a combination of two things, *traditium*, the information that is being preserved and transmitted to future generations, and *traditio*, the process of passing on that information. Therefore, the tradition includes the original teachings and practices of a religious group as well as their various reinterpretations throughout the ages. Tradition is always slightly changing, continually re-shaping the religious community in new and exciting ways.¹⁶

Educating for an engaged spirituality involves knowing and experiencing the tradition and intentionally drawing from that rich resource. Several different parts make up the tradition and all of them are essential conversation partners in the development of the spiritual life. Susanne Johnson, for instance, declares that the content of Christian education is the Christian Story, comprised of the entire witness of faith, including Scripture, liturgy, sacraments, symbols, rituals, creeds, doctrines, and more.¹⁷ Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality would certainly include these elements, but would place its greatest emphasis on the following: contemplative practices, social action, teachings and activities which reinforce the integral relationship between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice, and examples of both individuals and communities who live a holistic spiritual existence. Even more, this model would seek to soften the sharp demarcations often perceived between religious

¹⁶ Boys, *Educating in Faith*, 193-94.

¹⁷ Johnson, 90-91.

traditions. It does not equate faith tradition with the Christian tradition only, but recognizes the existence of an engaged spirituality tradition which encompasses those persons and communities of all times, places, cultures, and religions who exemplify this intentional union of nurture and action.

The experiential. A related issue involves paying attention to the experiential dimension of learning. Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality strongly affirms the interconnections among the intellectual, affective, spiritual and physical dimensions of human existence, and cautions against compartmentalizing human living into "intellectual" concerns, "spiritual" pursuits, etc. At the very core of human life, the intellectual, affective, spirituality, and physical aspects are interdependent; it is merely our language and perception of each dimension which create the illusion that the four are distinct. Likewise, this emphasis on the experiential provides a unifying link between spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice: rather than defining these two according to opposing poles--i.e., referring to nurture as only spiritual and theoretical and action as only physical and practical--they can be viewed as complementary aspects of the spiritual life which draw from and enrich *all* dimensions of human existence.

Careful attention to liturgy and the arts provides an important way to tap into this experiential dimension of the spiritual life. In keeping with Mary Boys' observation that tradition is more than just the information passed on through the generations, but also includes the various evolutions of that information throughout the ages, Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality should inspire persons to reinterpret familiar symbols and rituals from a holistic perspective. For example, Day demonstrated that the Eucharist can be understood both

as a means of grace which deepens one's personal relationship with God, and as the impetus to insure that all persons receive their daily bread. Likewise, Nhat Hanh teaches that the practice of meditation is a way for one person to cultivate mindfulness in everyday life as well as a means for discerning the interconnectedness of all being. Meditation should inspire one to speak, think and act in ways in keeping with this larger view of reality. Thus, as these examples attest, a person committed to engaged spirituality should not view any practice as either contemplative or active only, but always both/and.

Exemplars. Attention to the experiential dimension highlights the value of lived experience. Certainly one of the best ways to learn about the spiritual life--other than to experience it oneself-- is to observe the lives of others who are walking a spiritual path with integrity. I refer to these persons as "exemplars," people who exemplify the union of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. These lives can be accessed through the reading of biographies and autobiographies, through television shows and movies which depict such lives, and through the sharing of personal experience. These exemplars may not even be members of one's own religious tradition, race, or social group, Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality should foster the ability to recognize the ways in which certain people embody the characteristics to which all spiritual seekers can aspire.

The historical and cultural context. Certainly one of the most pervasive, yet often overlooked, curricular forms which informs the content of Christian religious education is the historical/cultural context in which teaching and learning take place. The context should have an impact on everything a congregation does, from the content of its communal prayers to decisions about mission projects.

Unfortunately, a great many churches fail to pay attention to the larger forces at work in the world, within the immediate community, and in the lives of individual persons. Here is where an emphasis on engaged spirituality enables congregations to become more attentive to context: providing spiritual nurture and engaging in acts of compassion and justice--particularly when cultivated in concert with each other--create greater awareness of the larger forces of history and allow persons to have a hand in shaping history and culture in real and measurable ways. Day and Nhat Hanh were both deeply aware of the ongoing interplay between religion and culture and sought ways to make the relationship mutually transformative. They did this, however, not by allowing themselves to be carried along by any sweep of history, but by firmly grounding themselves in their own religious traditions and then interpreting and challenging the culture according to what they believed to be enduring and true.

In my experience with progressive and other liberal Christian congregations, I have discovered that they are more likely to define themselves and interpret the Christian tradition according to the reigning culture rather than embrace the notion that Christian belief and practice should shape how they understand themselves and their relationship to culture. Therefore, I believe that progressive Christians need to re-think the connection between religion and culture. People who say they are Christian must look first to the religious heritage which has shaped their beliefs and practices when determining who they are and what they stand for. This heritage provides many of the boundaries I spoke of earlier. Certainly, this does not mean that one merely accepts everything that the tradition hands down, for even cherished traditions need to be reinterpreted in accordance with the changing social scene and evolving spiritual insights. Rather, to say that the Christian story interprets the historical and cultural context

means that individuals and congregations are actively involved in learning from and giving shape to an evolving tradition which will continue to nurture Christians for generations to come. In this way, religion and culture can be mutually transformed.

Teaching and Learning

In this next portion of the chapter, I discuss how engaged spirituality might influence the ways people teach and learn in progressive Christian congregations. These recommendations are the practical application of both the lessons learned from Day and Nhat Hanh and the guiding principles with which I began this chapter.

Members explore new ways of being in community which foster the aims of engaged spirituality. Clearly, old models of congregational life which relegate education to one hour each week or which compartmentalize nurture and action into separate emphases within a church's program need to be replaced with new ways of being in community together. Since Nhat Hanh and Day both affirmed that living in community is an indispensable factor in shaping and sustaining an engaged spirituality, what then can we conclude about the type of community that will shape and sustain a commitment to engaged spirituality? First and foremost, the community must demonstrate intentionality to unite spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. In other words, it must be a community in which engaged spirituality is valued, taught, and practiced. Secondly, a community of persons committed to uniting nurture and action might take a variety of forms, as long as the first condition is satisfied. By this I mean that the form the community takes may not be nearly as important as the intentionality and commitment it exhibits. Let me offer two examples:

One type of Christian community intentionally living an engaged spirituality would require a radical commitment to a monastic style of living. Members would be asked to pledge themselves to the aims of the community, much like the way members of the Order of Interbeing vow to follow, as they are able, the Mindfulness Trainings. Disciplined spiritual nurture and ongoing acts of compassion and justice would comprise the aims of such a community. All persons would share in contributing to the group, through the giving of their time, talents and other resources. This intentional community could take different forms: individuals and families might live together communally and pool their resources, much like the early church of the New Testament or religious communes of past generations; or persons could come together for worship, study, prayer and service as demonstrated by the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C.¹⁸ Admittedly, adherence to a radical model such as this requires intense commitment and profound intentionality on the part of church members.

For those pastoral leaders who wish to teach engaged spirituality but do not sense among congregational members the deep level of commitment needed to sustain a monastic style of community, another type of Christian community focused on living an engaged spirituality is needed. This second type of community could take the form of small groups within a congregation whose members engage in spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. Traditionally small groups have served specific functions, such as to accomplish a particular task, foster spiritual growth, or engage in social action. Why not create groups which intentionally cultivate an engaged spirituality? Why not challenge every member in the congregation to become part of a covenant group for spiritual nurture and carrying out acts of compassion and justice? The purpose of these groups would be to provide a setting for

¹⁸ See *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* by O'Connor.

both reflection and action and to teach people appropriate contemplative practices and social action techniques which support an engaged spirituality. Because of differences in temperament, certain persons would be drawn more to a group which includes Bible study, prayer, and reflection on one's own spiritual journey, while other persons might want to be in a group that mobilizes people for action. To be true to the principles of engaged spirituality, however, small group ministry must seek to incorporate both spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice so that contemplatives are challenged to critically reflect upon their faith and act in ways consistent with their spirituality, and activists learn to discern God's will for their lives and in the causes in which they are involved. In this way, persons are encouraged to expand their spiritual awareness to embrace a more holistic way of being.

As far as Day and Nhat Hanh are concerned, I believe our exemplars would both more naturally gravitate toward the first type of community I described, Day because of her need to be part of a radical, active community, and Nhat Hanh because of his inclination toward monastic life. Based on my reading of his teachings about Sangha, I think it is also true that Nhat Hanh would affirm the second form of community as appropriate and helpful in supporting persons' spiritual practice. My sense is that Day would see this second form of community as too supportive of the status quo, both within the church and within society. Nevertheless, I agree with Nhat Hanh that a community of engaged spirituality does not need to be large, but most often begins with just two or three persons. The formation and nurture of small groups of practice and support may very well be key in moving persons toward the more radical vision embraced by Day and Nhat Hanh.

The community exhibits an ongoing commitment to teach and participate in the practices which form and nurture an engaged spirituality. The main characteristic of the communities chosen by Day and Nhat Hanh is the practice of engaged spirituality. They each explored what this meant in their own contexts, i.e., as Day confronted the needs of workers and the poor and the effects of war in twentieth-century America, and as Nhat Hanh struggled with living out his *bodhisattva* vow in the midst of his war-torn homeland. They readily instructed others in the practices which sustain an engaged spirituality, Day primarily through her writings and personal example, and Nhat Hanh through his teachings and way of life. What are some of the ways in which contemporary congregations can teach and provide opportunities to practice engaged spirituality?

First of all, the individual temperaments and abilities of persons should be celebrated and nurtured. As we have seen, a person may be drawn first toward contemplative or active expressions of religious faith. It really does not seem to matter which perspective comes first as long as both are consistently taught and conscientiously practiced over a lifetime; religious education for an engaged spirituality should strive for the union of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice and encourage persons to explore those dimensions of the spiritual life that are undeveloped or untapped in their own experience.

Secondly, the life stories and spiritual commitments of Day and Nhat Hanh suggest that particular attention should be given to contemplative practices. Both of these exemplars affirm that participation in practices such as prayer, meditation, study of sacred scripture, and deep personal reflection helped to keep them grounded and clearly focused on the work they had to do. Contemporary Christian congregations would do well to reflect on the depth of commitment to

contemplative practices exhibited within their own settings. Those churches which discover they have not given diligent attention to these practices may wish to enhance the church's curriculum by offering instruction in prayer forms, protracted periods of silence in worship, devotional study of the Bible, opportunities for retreat, and small group reflection on the personal and communal aspects of Christian living.

Finally, community members should seek to infuse all aspects of church life with the aims and practices of engaged spirituality. Engaged spirituality should not be viewed as merely an emphasis in the curriculum of the church, but rather the overall goal and purpose of the community's life together. With such a goal in mind, then, each congregation should explore how the union of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice find expression in all dimensions of congregational life and ministry, including worship, mission, teaching, preaching, community-building, and spiritual formation. Is the community tending to compartmentalize spiritual nurture and social action by expecting the Sunday School to attend to the former and enjoining a mission committee to lead them in the latter? Or, does the community affirm that commitment to spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice is the responsibility of the entire congregation?

The community expects and empowers teachers and leaders to model an engaged spirituality by the reflective, deliberate manner in which they attend to their spiritual lives. Perhaps the most important lesson Day and Nhat Hanh have to offer is that teachers should model engaged spirituality by the way they live and the manner in which they teach. Ideally, whether inside or outside the classroom, teachers should actually live the holistic spirituality they are asked to teach. Because church members look to congregational and denominational leaders

for guidance, these designated leaders should also be persons who are committed to an engaged spirituality and who provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on and strengthen a holistic spirituality in their own lives. Even more, congregations need to broaden their understanding of "teacher" to include much more than just the individuals given that title: all of the many things one encounters in life are potential teachers--including people, experiences, ideas and events--if one is willing to pay attention to the lessons they offer. For instance, the person quietly going about her ministry to shut-ins is a teacher just as much as a devastating event in one individual's life is an opportunity for learning and understanding. Teachers and leaders play a crucial role in facilitating the meaning of these experiences.

The spiritual life, however, is not all sunshine and roses; quite often it involves thorns and unknown paths. Those who teach engaged spirituality must come to accept this two-sided nature of the spiritual life and be willing to share deeply out of their own experiences, both the triumphs and the struggles. Palmer explains that unless teachers are comfortable with diversity and aware of their own inner contradictions, they cannot foster openness and inclusivity in others.¹⁹ Spiritual development in the congregation must attend to all dimensions of the spiritual life, particularly those aspects which are difficult and frightening. To do this effectively, critical reflection skills must be taught and practiced. By this I mean that persons, both individually and in groups, should be encouraged to do the very hard work of making sense of events, experiences, and other learning opportunities. In a word, individual and corporate shadows need to be brought to light and fully integrated into the life of the community.

¹⁹ Parker J. Palmer, "'All the Way Down': A Spirituality of Public Life," in *Caring for the Commonweal: Education for Religious and Public Life*, ed. Parker J. Palmer, et al. (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1990), 161.

In the midst of a supportive community, and utilizing a variety of rational, psychological, contemplative and kinesthetic techniques, they can seek to answer questions like, What do these events teach me about myself, my community and my world? In light of this, who is God calling me to be? What is God calling me to do? How is God shaping and calling forth this community of faith in this time and place?

One way to guide and support teachers in this endeavor is to offer three annual workshops focusing on the topics of theology, spirituality, and teaching methodology. The first workshop would invite teachers to actively engage theological concepts such as God, Jesus Christ, the mission of the church, and the work of the Holy Spirit. In conversation with scripture, historical teachings, and each other, they would reflect on the content of their faith at this point in their lives. Being careful not to overemphasize the intellectual component of learning, this workshop would also allow the participants to consider the emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions of their engagement with theological concepts. The purpose of this exercise is to broaden theological understandings and infuse teachers with confidence as they approach complicated subjects. The second workshop would explore teachers' spiritual development from the perspective of engaged spirituality. The program could include a spiritual inventory (similar to Ware's), consideration of spiritual exemplars, an exploration of a variety of spiritual practices, the opportunity to engage in these practices, and suggestions for encouraging an engaged spirituality in the lives of others. The third workshop on methodology would provide ideas for activities which incorporate the intellectual, affective, spiritual, and physical dimensions of learning; guide teachers in working with different age groups; and address the issues of classroom discipline and working with persons who have special needs. These three workshops would enable teachers to incorporate a holistic spirituality

into their teaching, encouraging them to become exemplars, not teachers only, of engaged spirituality.

Teaching within the community seeks to expand personal, interpersonal, and global awareness. Using an image from Buddhism, teaching for an engaged spirituality should enable people to wake up. This coming into awareness has various names--enlightenment, conversion, transformation, conscientization, consciousness raising, or shock--and it occurs on several levels--personally, interpersonally, and globally.

Awareness of oneself, one's abilities and failings, one's sense of vocation and personal responsibility is the beginning of spirituality and is the foundation upon which interpersonal relationships must be built. Day admittedly struggled with her own personal awareness, bringing to light some failings, but allowing many more to stay hidden in the shadow. These struggles were fundamental in shaping her response to others: on one level they motivated her to reach out to others in penance for what she perceived as her own sins, and on another level they led her to judge others--sometimes quite harshly--for the very sins she was unable to overcome in her own life. In 1939 she wrote:

I see only too clearly how bad people are. I wish I did not see it so. It is my own sins that give me such clarity. If I did not bear the scars of so many sins to dim my sight and dull my capacity for love and joy, then I would see Christ more clearly in you all.²⁰

Despite the negative tone of this statement, Day saw a more positive dimension to her personal awareness as well, in that it made her cognizant of the danger of hypocrisy and reminded her to act in ways consistent with the beliefs she professed.²¹

Because of his deep practice of mindfulness meditation, Nhat Hanh's personal awareness is perhaps better developed than Day's. Like Day, he sees a strong connection between personal awareness and interpersonal relationships. Observation of oneself--one's thoughts,

²⁰ Day, *House of Hospitality*, 256.

²¹ Coles, 34-35.

emotions, attitudes, and actions--leads to personal equilibrium and freedom from fears and anxiety. The harmony one feels within oneself affects interactions with others, giving energy to harmony within them, until finally the whole human family experiences harmony.²²

Nhat Hanh's conviction suggests the direction we are to go: engaged spirituality must move beyond personal and interpersonal awareness to a sense of global awareness, what might be called interdependence or radical relatedness. Nhat Hanh refers to this as interbeing, a principle rooted in Buddhist social teaching and continually reinforced by his interactions with persons throughout the world. Day talks instead of the presence of Christ in every human being, concluding that if persons recognized the truth that all people are brothers and sisters in Christ, there would be no more war.²³ From the perspective of engaged spirituality, striving to increase personal, interpersonal, and global awareness is absolutely foundational for the fostering of the sense of radical interdependence needed for both inner and outer change.

Some of the best tools for increasing awareness are found in the spiritual exercises of the great religious traditions, including prayer, contemplation, scripture study, examination of conscience, service to others, and ascetical practices, such as fasting and voluntary poverty. Congregations which not only teach but offer opportunities for members to practice these various activities may find awareness growing by leaps and bounds. The duration and intensity of activities will also have to be considered. While some persons will have the enthusiasm and discipline to undertake a practice of daily prayer, for instance, others might require the intensive experience of a weekend retreat before committing to a regular contemplative practice. While the reiteration

²² Nhat Hanh, "The Human Family," in *Love in Action*, 122-24.

²³ Miller, *All Is Grace*, 146-47.

of statistics might spark new consciousness for one, another person might need to spend several afternoons serving meals to the homeless on skid row before committing to a regular social action practice. Whatever the situation, skilled educators should be willing and able to utilize a variety of educational methods and know their people well enough to determine which methods will be most effective in their context.

Persons are expected and enabled to engage in active, respectful encounters with "the other." Earlier I wrote that Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality is based on the belief in interdependence and the realization that truth supersedes sectarianism. Engaging in active, respectful encounters with those who are different from oneself, whether racially, socially, or religiously, is the practical expression of those spiritual attitudes. But cultivating respectful relationships with other people may not be enough. Engaged spirituality, as expressed by Day and Nhat Hanh, suggests that other relationships must be attended to as well--relationships with oneself, with God, and with the natural world. All of these relationships are interrelated; they draw strength from each other and direct the path that each relationship will ultimately take. Therefore, encounter with "the other" takes on a multi-layered perspective, as persons seek to engage all other beings, including God, people, the non-human world, and even the otherness in oneself. The goals of this encounter are threefold: to learn from the other, to perchance positively influence the other, and to ultimately stand in awe and gratitude of mysteries in the other one may never fully understand.

To foster an engaged spirituality within a Christian community of faith, persons should be encouraged to engage actively with "the other" in all of its forms. Recognizing the existence of the shadow side of

each personality, spiritual exercises and psychological insights should lead one to encounter, perhaps even embrace, "the other" in oneself. Although this type of shadow work is hard, community members might find that their small groups are a supportive place for the type of inner work necessary to make personal and interpersonal awareness possible. Encounter with the natural world can also be a form of spiritual nurture which motivates one to engage in acts of compassion and justice. Ways to facilitate encounters with nature are numerous: backpacking trips which incorporate discussion of environmental destruction and contemplative exercises; community involvement in environmental recovery programs, such as "Save the Bay Day," combined with intentional reflection on the personal, global, and theological dimensions of the activity; and the teaching of contemplative practices like those encouraged by Nhat Hanh: walking mindfully upon the earth and looking deeply into a flower.

God is "the other" most often sought by Christians seeking to walk a spiritual path. Spiritual seekers have often recognized that each person, community, and situation is fulfilled according to a timetable that only God can comprehend. No one can fully direct the path of any lifetime or completely control the outcome of any situation. Similarly, no one can ever completely know the mind of God, although through spiritual practices it is possible to catch glimpses of and participate in God's vision for the world. This is not to suggest, however, that one can manipulate God through the use of these spiritual practices. One of the dangers of engaging only in contemplative practices is the possibility of becoming too smugly self-centered in one's spirituality thereby missing the larger ramifications--and responsibilities--of personal commitment to following God's call. One of the dangers of engaging only in social action is the proliferation of the illusion that one is in control of the situation. Hence, action must be accompanied

by deep contemplation so that one might grow in the assurance that the work one does is ultimately in service to God. Social action, for instance, should include efforts at discerning the will of God, time for prayer and Bible study, and deep reflection during and following activity. Participation in this intentional practice may make it a bit easier for individuals and communities to release the work to God and to foster a healthy detachment from the final outcome. Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality teaches that despite one's efforts to grow in awareness of God and to answer God's call for compassion and justice, human understanding will always be partial, requiring one ultimately to bow in reverence to Divine Mystery.

Relationships with others who are quite different from oneself can be fostered through the formation of partnerships with a Christian congregation in another community, a non-Christian congregation in one's own neighborhood, or a nearby religious or social service organization. Some of these coalitions are formed out of necessity, as when a local situation demands joint effort, while other partnerships are borne out of a deep desire to dialogue with those who are different. Whatever the circumstances, one must be careful that the attitude they bring to the encounter is one of openness and honesty, not superiority and closed-mindedness.

Meaningful encounters with other persons can also be facilitated within a Christian congregation itself through the fostering of intergenerational relationships, attention to encounters among participants within the teaching/learning process, increasing communication between parents and their children, the growth of small group ministry, and ongoing commitment to carrying out acts of compassion and justice. Within any community setting--even the most homogeneous--significant differences exist in belief, experience, and outlook for the future. Parker Palmer believes that consensus is the

best tool for helping people to accept, rather than run away from, these differences. As opposed to majority rule, consensus requires that people work together "to honor their differences, to listen to contradictions, to speak unpopular insights, and to allow this searching to move the group toward insights it did not have before the process began."²⁴ In a word, consensus is a spiritual approach to engagement with the other in a congregational setting. It complements the many ways in which persons struggle to engage others in their communities, in the global village, in the natural world, and within themselves.

The Unique Features of Christian Religious Education for an Engaged Spirituality

My theory of Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality provides a unique combination of three features. While these individual features may be found elsewhere, they are nowhere else offered in this particular configuration.

The formation of intentional community for the stated purpose of engaging in spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. My theory is firmly rooted in the Gospel call to follow the example of Jesus who brought together the inward and outward movements of the spiritual life. I see nurture and action as complementary aspects of a holistic spirituality, not two poles between which persons vacillate their whole life long. I envision the community of faith as the locus of engaged spirituality--the place where the spiritual life is taught and nurtured and persons are inspired to participate in this integrated way of life. I also recognize that people may begin as either primarily contemplative or active, but also affirm that a complete educational program should encourage them to gradually embrace both aspects of the spiritual life. In contrast to those theorists who exhibit an obvious

²⁴ Palmer, "'All the Way Down,'" 162.

bias toward one or the other, I would not say that either one is better, just that both are needed.

This study of two exemplars highlights the intentionality with which Day and Nhat Hanh related to community. Because of the differences in their individual experiences with community, I do not believe that their examples necessarily prescribe the full parameters of what that community could or should look like. The quest to live an engaged spirituality in the midst of community can take many forms as long as it satisfies two criteria: intentionality of living the spiritual life and diligent attention to the union of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. Even more, the examples set forth by Day and Nhat Hanh should inspire new ways of being in community together.

Earlier I described three religious education theories which sought to integrate contemplation and action, namely, works by Maria Harris, Susanne Johnson and Parker Palmer. While community life is important for all three of these writers, only Johnson makes community the locus of activity and the hub around which everything else revolves.²⁵ My inclination is to agree with her assessment that the community of faith ought to provide spiritual formation by engaging in worship, instruction and praxis.²⁶ Theoretically, at least, her ideas are congruent with my own. However, I believe that my initial critiques are still valid: First, she overemphasizes the active to the detriment of the contemplative. In fact, she makes this claim at the beginning of her book when she explains her contention that the contemporary interest in spirituality has tended to make persons more narcissistic and preoccupied with themselves.²⁷ This underlying perspective has shaped her theory in such a way that she pushes away from the contemplative

²⁵ Johnson, 123.

²⁶ Ibid., 143-46.

²⁷ Ibid., 17.

aspects of spirituality, fearing perhaps that they will feed unhealthy self-serving interests. I strongly disagree with her viewpoint, believing as I do that the self-reflective work of contemplative practices is an absolutely necessary element of spiritual formation provided, of course, that it is carried out in conjunction with reflection on relationships with others and action consistent with that reflection. Secondly, I do not agree with Johnson that the church is the only community which forms persons' spirituality, or that it is the only place they can live out their spiritual calling.²⁸ Looking at the experience of our exemplars, it seems clear that sometimes the accepted religious community is not the best place to pursue an engaged spirituality; sometimes a new community is needed which is not hampered by the constraints exhibited by organized religion. Thirdly, Johnson's theory is not grounded in research of the lives of real people. I believe that the best instructors in engaged spirituality are those persons who are actively and intentionally living integrated lives of contemplation and action. Without such experiential grounding, her work is too theoretical to be accepted without further proof.

Learning from exemplars. By far, the one feature of my theory which sets it apart from all others is my emphasis on exemplars. Among other writers, only three use lived experience as an essential component of their work. Elizabeth O'Connor, though not writing from the perspective of religious education, describes the overall program of education, worship and mission which comprises the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C. She is short on theory but gives an elegant snapshot of one church's struggle to live the "journey inward and journey outward." Letty Russell also begins her inquiry with the lived experience of a congregation--East Harlem Protestant Parish in New York city. As I noted earlier, she does not fully integrate spiritual

²⁸ Ibid., 70.

nurture and acts of compassion and justice: her bias is clearly toward mission, although she calls upon contemplative practices in service of active ministry. The third writer who draws upon a form of lived experience is Parker Palmer. In *The Active Life* he studies vignettes from the "lives" of fictional characters to see what wisdom they share for living the spiritual life. His approach is interesting and creative, and at least one of our exemplars--Dorothy Day--was deeply touched by the exploits of fictional characters. Nevertheless, the inspiration of fiction is not enough; the inspirational example of real persons who share their real life struggles and triumphs is also needed if individuals and communities are to find sustenance for their own endeavors to live an engaged spirituality.

There is another aspect of learning from exemplars that is rarely broached, namely, the fact that persons who exemplify an engaged spirituality are found in all cultures and religious traditions and throughout history. Some Christian religious educators, for instance, have explored the interreligious aspect of religious education. Most prominent are the educators who have sought to understand the relational dimension of spiritual formation by exploring connections between Christianity and Judaism, such as, the work of Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee; Padraic O'Hare; and Maria Harris, Gabriel Moran and Sherry Blumberg.²⁹ Also of note is the work of educators who have developed their understanding of Christian spiritual formation by placing Christian spirituality in conversation with Eastern spiritual

²⁹ See "Ecumenical and Interreligious Education" (entire issue), *Religious Education* 90 (spring 1995): 170-312; "Religious Traditions in Conversation" (entire issue), *Religious Education* 91 (fall 1996): 415-620; Mary C. Boys, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: One Woman's Experience* (New York: Paulist, 1997); Padraic O'Hare, *The Enduring Covenant: The Education of Christians and the End of Antisemitism* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1997); and Maria Harris, Gabriel Moran, and Sherry Blumberg, "What Christians Can Learn from Jews," in *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice*, by Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, 151-63 (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998).

traditions, e.g., Parker Palmer and Padraic O'Hare.³⁰ Educating for an engaged spirituality requires the seeking out of exemplars, even if this means one must cross denominational and religious lines. My study has made it eminently clear that a Protestant can be inspired by the life of a Catholic, and a Christian can learn from the disciplined practice of a Buddhist. In my view, Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality cannot define the faith tradition as narrowly "Christian" but must enlarge it to include a more inclusive "engaged spirituality" tradition which comprises those persons and communities from all times, places, cultures, and religions who exemplify the union of spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice.

Informed by radical interdependence. Educating for an engaged spirituality recognizes two forms of radical interdependence: the interdependence of all dimensions of the human person--intellect, emotions, physical body, and spiritual sensibilities--and the interdependence of the personal, interpersonal, and global dimensions of human existence. I talked at length in the first chapter about my understanding of the holistic nature of the human person, and I am certainly not the only one to offer such a description. What does set my theory apart from others, however, is my emphatic refusal to associate certain human faculties with particular emphases in the spiritual life. For instance, I do not agree with Johnson who equates religious instruction with rational reflection and Christian praxis with active ministry.³¹ Nor do I like John Westerhoff's separation of the spiritual life and the moral life, when he says that the first cultivates the love of God while the second involves love of neighbor.³² To live holistically, one must seek to integrate nurture and action with all the dimensions of human life. In other words, contemplative

³⁰ See Palmer, *Active Life*; and O'Hare, *Way of Faithfulness*.

³¹ Johnson, 143-46.

³² Westerhoff, *Spiritual Life*, 1.

practices should not be defined as "spiritual" according to some narrow definition, but should incorporate the intellectual, affective, physical and spiritual dimensions of human life. The same integration is needed when individuals and communities engage in social action, an endeavor which is so often only associated with physical and attitudinal change.

The interdependence of these four aspects of the human person is complemented by the radical interdependence of the personal, interpersonal and global dimensions of human life. Several advocates of social justice education do make a solid connection between personal choices and global responsibility.³³ None of these religious educators, however, draws upon this notion of interdependence to describe the spiritual life. Day and Nhat Hanh continually affirm that what a person does, says, and is has a tremendous impact on other people and the larger world. They directly challenge the belief that responsibility is personal and private only. Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality should do no less.

Recommendations for Further Research

First, this model needs to be put to the test in congregations to see how effective it is in nurturing engaged spirituality. Because of the all-too-common misperception that contemplation and action are opposites, congregations tend to gravitate toward one or the other, an emphasis on prayer and sanctification, or a distinct movement toward acts of compassion and justice. Some congregations have well-developed contemplative groups or social programs, but few have intentionally sought to integrate spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. Of course, such integrative programs face certain obstacles: they may be vehemently opposed by persons who insist on a narrow

³³ See, for instance, Elias, 169-72; Justice/Peace Education Council, 23-30; Moore, 181-86; and Toton, *World Hunger*, 154-57.

definition of "spirituality" as only the inward dimension of religious expression, or by those who do not think the church should be involved in the world of politics. When the pastoral leadership is committed to a holistic spirituality there is great potential for its acceptance by members of the congregation. But even without the pastor's support, small groups of persons conscientiously seeking to integrate nurture and action can have a tremendous effect on the congregation as a whole. However engaged spirituality is introduced into a congregation, additional field-based study is needed to see what allows it to take hold and grow in communities of faith.

Second, a more thorough comparison is needed of the progressive understanding of engaged spiritual presented in this project and the engaged spirituality which exists in other, more conservative traditions. How do evangelical or fundamentalist Christian groups, many of whom would not share my expansive definition of truth, conceive of their engaged spirituality? How do their theological and philosophical underpinnings differ from my own? I noted earlier my sense that the inclination to unite spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice does seem to require a willingness to be in dialogue with others who are different from oneself. The one entering into the conversation may not ascribe to an ideology which accepts other viewpoints as equally valid as their own, but this fact does not diminish the value of a person's dual engagement with spiritual nurture and acts of compassion and justice. Again, field-based research is needed that will seek out these differences and perhaps uncover the similarities upon which cooperative endeavors could be based.

Third, there is a need to study the lives of ordinary people who seek to live engaged spiritualities. I use the word "ordinary" to designate the average but extraordinary people who are quietly and consistently living lives of contemplation and action in communities all

over the world. While several investigators have studied the lives of activists, and a few have concentrated their efforts on well-known religious persons who intentionally integrate the contemplative and activist dimensions of their spiritual quests, no one has done a comprehensive study of non-famous individuals who express engaged spiritualities. I wonder, How do their struggles and challenges compare to those of their famous counterparts? What is the role of their faith community in shaping their engaged spirituality?

Fourth, the relationship between engaged spirituality and pacifism needs to be explored more fully. The preliminary evidence seems to suggest that most persons who exhibit an engaged spirituality also adhere to a pacifist philosophy. Is this indeed a general trend among these persons? How do factors such as religious teaching and cultural context affect a person's decision to choose pacifism? In what way do these insights apply to peace education? A comprehensive study of engaged spirituality across religious and cultural lines could yield some clues to this very interesting question.

Fifth, to complement the present chapter on Christian religious education, a parallel chapter called "Buddhist Religious Education for an Engaged Spirituality" needs to be written. Based on this present study, there is already ample information to offer suggestions for Buddhist educational settings which incorporate lessons learned from the lives of Day and Nhat Hanh. Furthermore, because engaged spirituality finds expression in all religious traditions, educational programs appropriate for each religious setting can--and most certainly should--be developed.

Finally, this study also offers interesting implications for the issues of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. For instance, this work suggests that there are certain similarities (in

addition to numerous differences) in the expression of engaged spirituality regardless of one's religious affiliation. Does this discussion add anything to the historical and experiential study of religions? Could this dual commitment to contemplative practice and social action be a foundation upon which interreligious understanding and meaningful dialogue could be built? Engaged spirituality should certainly be viewed as one indispensable factor in seeking unity among persons expressing varying beliefs.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let me share a conversation between two brothers which demonstrates the hunger for an integrated way of life best satisfied by a pedagogy based on engaged spirituality. The boys, who were eating pizza and discussing their favorite sports team at the local mall, were suddenly confronted by a deaf man selling pencils to support his family. "Why does God let people be deaf?" the younger boy wondered. With deep compassion the older boy, a teenager, told his brother, "Sometimes God just lets things be." After several silent, thoughtful minutes, the younger boy responded, "I don't think God wants anyone to be deaf, but I know he wants me to do what I can to help him." Listening to that exchange, I could not resist smiling at the expression of two budding engaged spiritualities. How will they find their way unless someone offer them both spiritual nurture and opportunities to engage in acts of compassion and justice? I believe it is incumbent upon congregations to embrace the principles and practices of Christian religious education for an engaged spirituality so that their members may find the direction they seek and so richly deserve as children of a welcoming, just, and compassionate God.

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Studies of Social Activists

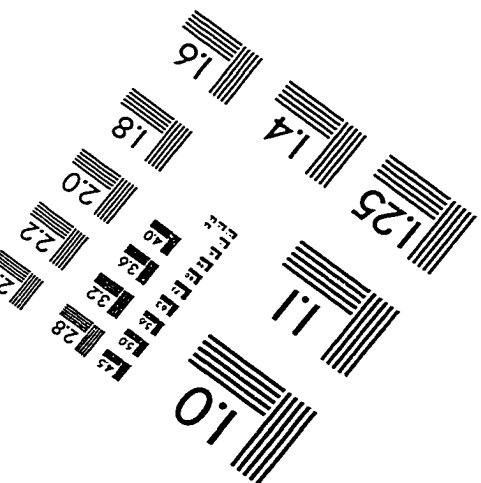
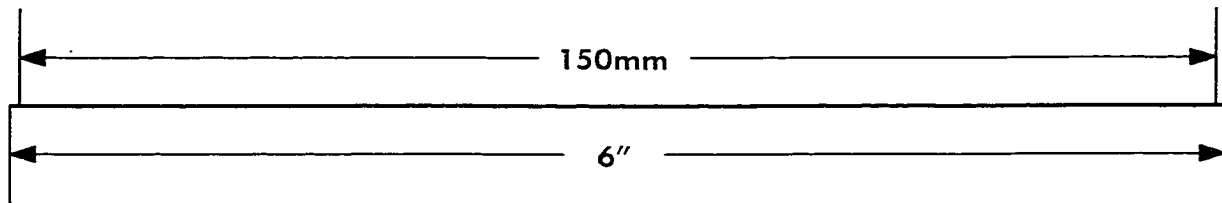
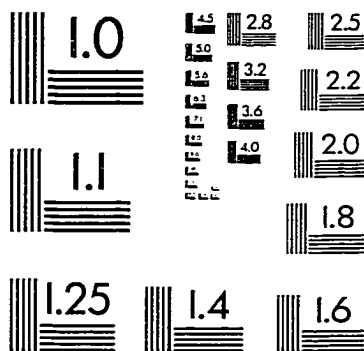
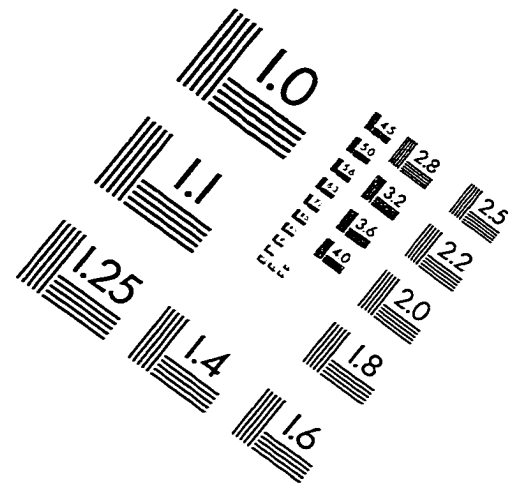
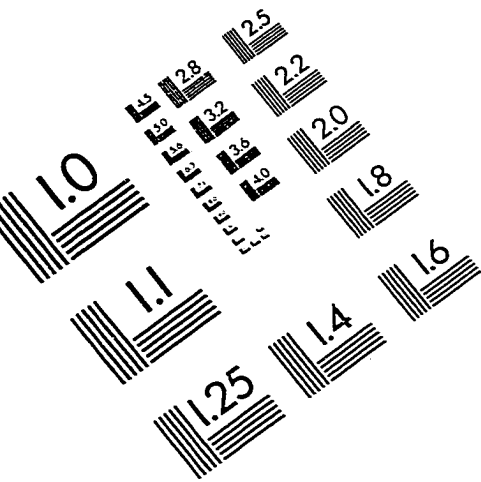
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